PROMINENT PERSONALITIES AMONG THE LEPCHAS

Dr D. C. Roy

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Foreword

Dr D. C. Roy of Kalimpong College has been associated with the original indigenous Lepchas of Mayel Lyang for the last twenty five years or so. He is an enduring friend of the Lepchas. Carefully selecting a serious subject, “Dynamics of Social Formation among the Lepchas (2005),” Ren D. C. Roy did an extensive field survey and research work among the Lepchas in remote villages and deservedly obtained his PhD from the University of North Bengal. It is not too far wrong to say that almost all the research scholars who come to do their work with the Lepchas, on completion of their work, it seems, they never return back to the Lepcha world but Dr D. C. Roy is an exceptional scholar who very religiously and loyally continues to be with his Lepchas and do his further research work; his four outstanding books and innumerable articles on the Lepchas are the true testimony to his dedication, loyalty, love and respect for the Lepcha people and nation. He is more Lepcha than most Lepchas.

The Lepcha leaders included in this book, “Prominent Personalities among the Lepchas,” led the Lepcha nation with good examples. They always very clearly thought about their downtrodden and marginalized Lepchas first and foremost and took the necessary actions risking their lives during serious crisis. All of them were born leaders. Out of the fourteen Lepcha leaders listed in the book, four of them are great Lepcha ladies. It clearly shows that the Lepcha ladies are second to none in leading the Lepcha world. We salute them all. To protect, safeguard and promote the varied Lepcha interests for posterity, the Lepchas of today should seriously think and act to produce more trained Lepcha leaders as well.

Thikoong General G.B. Mainwaring, the Champion of the Lepchas, and Dr R.K. Sprigg, Lepcha Saheb of Kalimpong, and their outstanding work for the Lepcha cause still inspire us all and undoubtedly, it will continue to motivate and influence the future Lepchas. Both Thikoong General G.B. Mainwaring and Dr R. K. Sprigg were extraordinary and enduring friends of the Lepchas of Mayel Lyang.

I warmly congratulate Dr D. C. Roy for his outstanding creative writings on the Lepcha leaders, past and present, and sincerely hope that he will continue to write more about the remaining Lepcha leaders of Mayel Lyang to record and inspire the future Lepcha generations.

20 December 2014

LYANGSONG TAMSANG
Chairman
Mayel Lyang Lepcha Development Board
Kalimpong

Preface

At the very outset I would like to express my sincere and heartfelt thanks and gratitude to Ren Lyangsong Tamsang, the present Chairman of Mayel Lyang Lepcha Development Board for accepting my draft and taking necessary arrangements in printing the matter in the book form. I am thankful to all the Executive Members of the Board for extending all sorts of help in preparing the book. I am also indebted to Ren Lyangsong Tamsang for writing the Foreword of the book.

Writings on some of the Lepcha personalities have already been published in different issues of 'Aachuley', 'King Gaeboo Aachyok News Magazine', 'Himalayan Times'. I am thankful to these institutions for allowing me to reproduce them with some modification in the present book.

The present book is an initial attempt to record some of the strong personalities who served the community in different periods and saved or mobilized the Lepchas against the crisis. The nature and pattern of leadership relate to the need and requirement of the community at different times. The mode of functioning of the leadership during the British rule was different from that of during the last quarter of the 19th Century and further changed in the present century. The method of protest and expression of grievances has completely changed over time. In this situation, an attempt has been made to narrate the socio-economic condition under which the leadership emerges and required by the community. The book may be used as record of facts and has tremendous historical value for posterity.

Information regarding the Lepcha leaders of historical periods are not available as the Lepcha history has not been recorded systematically. So many things on the Lepchas have been done by the scholars in the recent past but there are lot many things like a systematic history of the Lepcha society has not been written so far. The present book does not attempt to explore the historical facts but tries to keep on record some facts and personal details of the present day leaders among the Lepchas. I am sure there are more leaders whose names and course of actions are to be included in the revised edition of the book in the future.

There must be enough scope to improve the standard of the book by incorporating more facts and figures which are missed out in the present issue. I would be thankful and honoured to include more facts in the next issue if the details are available.

The book is expected to be useful to the researchers, scholars, administrators, general readers and the common Lepchas.

Kalimpong: 20 December 2014 *Dr D. C. Roy*

INTRODUCTION

A community, whatever be its size and area of action, expresses its dreams and desires through a leader. The feelings, typical to a particular clan or community, always try to ventilate through a person or a group of persons, elected or selected, for materialization. The purpose and target of a leader center on the betterment of his community. The tribal leader with its ethnic background always remains dedicated to its ethnic cause which brings forth some form of elevation contrary to other types of leadership in vogue.

The leadership has its various stands like physical and mental courage, religious bend, social insights, political stratagem, charismatic personality etc. As in general leadership style, the tribal community leadership emerges out of its own community background. It also provides security to its fellow masses and gives inspiration to act accordingly.

The Lepchas:

The original inhabitants of the Eastern Himalayas call themselves 'Mutanchi Rong Kup Rum Kup' or in short 'Rong'. But they are popularly known as 'Lepcha' in the outside world. Mayel Lyang was their original homeland. At present they spread and are the citizens of three countries: India, Nepal and Bhutan. Most of the Lepchas now are concentrated in Darjeeling district of West Bengal and in the North district of Sikkim.

The endoethnonym of the tribe is 'Mutanchi Rong Kup Rum Kup' which literally means 'the son of the snowy peak or the son of God'. The name has been derived as per the source of the origin of the tribe. It is believed that God has created Fudong Thing and Nazaong Nyo, the first Lepcha male and female out of the virgin snow of Mt. Kanchanjunga. As the primogenitors of the tribe have

been created out of snow of the mountain, the tribe rightly named themselves as 'son of snowy peak' and as God created them, they correctly identified themselves as 'Children of God'. Their short name 'Rong' means 'the divine folk' or 'peak' is also associated with their source of origin.

But in course of time the beautiful tribe name has been corrupted and spelled differently before it take the present form, 'Lepcha'. Some say that it is derived from the Nepali word "Lap-che' means 'vile speaker' or 'Lapcha' means 'mild and submissive people'. It might have also been derived from their own word 'Lap-cho' means 'place of worship' or 'place to take rest'. During the British rule the word 'Lap-cho' or 'Lap-che' has been anglicized as 'Lepcha'.

The beautiful and divinely ordained name of the tribe has been corrupted at different stages before it takes the present form 'Lepcha'. The outsiders have snatched their original name and now they are forced to accept the name given by others.

In India, the Lepchas are residing in the state of Sikkim and in the hilly region of Darjeeling district of West Bengal. Due the rearrangement of their land some Lepchas are still found in the eastern part of Nepal and in the western part of Bhutan. The spread of Lepchas over the three countries is not due to their migratory character but due to the political shuffling of the old Lepcha land by the respective countries. The important Treaties, Agreements, which are responsible for the loss of Lepcha land are : **Blood Brotherhood Treaty** of 13th Century; **Bhutan War** of 1700; **Gorkha War** of 1791; **Segauli Treaty** of 1815; **Treaty of Titalia** of 1817; **Darjeeling Grant** of 1835; **Treaty of Tumlong** of 1861; **Treaty of Sinchula** of 1865; **British – China Convention** of 1890. But except for the Blood Brotherhood Treaty Lepchas were either involved or ever been made a party to any of the agreements by which their land was handed over to the third party.

Historical Lepcha Leadership:

Historically the chronology of Rong or Lepcha leaders is obscure. It is said that the whole body of Rong literary sources had been destroyed by the Tibetan invaders during the reign of Phuntso Namgyal, the first Tibetan Buddhist ruler of Sikkim (Mainwaring, 1876). It is also said according to the local hearsay that a big stone near Gazing monastery had a big crack due to heat generated by burning Lepcha papers, documents and manuscripts. But in many books one can find the names of many Lepcha leading figures though without mentioning the specific historical period of these personalities. It is therefore very difficult rather impossible to identify all these figures in chronological order by compiling the information scattered over various written and unwritten sources.

An attempt has been made to analyze the nature and necessity of Lepcha leadership under different stages of stress faced by the community. Tarvey Pano (king) or King Tarvey is the first notable figure in the Lepcha history. The period of reign of King Tarvey was 1420 approximately. After the death of King Tarvey, three successive Lepcha rulers (Tur-Sang Pano, Tur- Ageng Pano and Tur-Ayek Pano) sons of their royal father ruled the land. However, C. De B. Stocks, following Lepcha tradition, observed that Tarvey Pano and three other Panos ruled the land apparently at the same period. Then it can be inferred fairly that perhaps the old Lepcha land of Sikkim had more than one principality reigned under these Panos.

In the later period, monarchical rule failed to thrive in Sikkim. Many clans captured the sits of power and ruled specific geographical areas according to strength. Their role was to some extent or other less significant in history.

Before the Tibetan invasion, another if not last, remarkable leading figure that attracted was The-Kung Tek. Though he was a spiritual leader, the 32nd of the descendent of the divine origin, his role as temporal administrator drew much attention. In the history of Sikkim, this Lepcha leader brought forth a new dimension, with

far reaching effect. The Blood Treaty of which he was one of the parties (the other was Khy-Bumsa) paved the way for long lasting Tibetan suzerainty over Sikkim and destroyed Lepcha tradition, culture and language as a whole.

After Khy-Bumsa, his third son Mipon Rub ruled Sikkim. In true sense, he was not a king but a de facto ruler of the area. Later, Guru Tashi, forth son of Mipon Rub, succeeded him. In Guru Tashi's time, the capital was shifted to Gangtok from Rabdantse.

In the mean time, The-Kung Tek left this mundane world. In the absence of a socially accepted leader of his scale, Lepcha community was degenerated into many groups. This division within the community helped Guru Tashi to administer the country with less resistant. Moreover, Tashi and the later days rulers adopted two specific tactics to enfeeble revolts on the part of the Lepchas: (a) marrying Lepcha womenfolk to ensure the bases of political legitimacy, and (b) putting Athing or leaders in official position of administration. Guru Tashi, for instance, appointed Samban, a Lepcha leader as commander of the army as well as the advisor of the king.

If we look at the administrative policy and political stratagem followed in this period, it should be acknowledged that Tashi was a successful ruler. He not only consolidated the very foundation of Tibetan colonial rule in Sikkim but also laid the foundation of royal rule of Namgyal dynasty in Sikkim.

In the next generations, after Tashi two administrators captured the limelight. They were Jhalana Aphag and Guru Tenzing. Phuntso Namgyal who officially ascended the throne of Sikkim in 1642 was the son of Guru Tenzing.

There is a close interlink between Sikkimese history and political ups and downs in Tibet and Tibetan infiltration in Sikkim. Inter-religious clashes in Tibet during the 15th Century had its impact on socio-economic and political life of Sikkim. Prior to 1372, Nyangmapa religious sect (Red Hat) was the only oldest sect in

Tibet. According to some scholars, this Buddhist sect was in reality an admixture of old Bon cult and Buddhism. However, a new form of religious sect, viz, Gelugpa sect was emerged under the leadership of a reformer, named Tsangkhapa; and it reached its peak in 1447. Under this surge of reform movement, the followers of Nyangmapa sect had been washed out of Tibet and took shelter in Sikkim for regeneration. It is inferred that Khy-Bumsa and other Tibetan followers of the later period mostly belonged to that religious sect.

In the next two hundred years of Sikkim history these Nyangmapa followers played a very important role that ultimately culminated in the coronation of 1642. At the same time, the religious conflict amongst various sects was reduced through negotiation of the supreme leadership of Third Dalai Lama (Ngawang Lobsang Gyatso, 1617- 1682) of Tibet. The coronation of first royal ruler, the Chogyal, Phuntso Namgyal of Sikkim was recognized by Third Dalai Lama. The basis of Tibetan colonization in Sikkim became more resilient, and the rule of Chogyal remained undisturbed till its annexation in India in 14th May, 1975.

However in the opinion of local historian (Dahal, 1983), this coronation was marked by violence and bloodshed. To make Chogyal of Tibetan origin acceptable to both Lepcha and Limboo communities several tactics and above all special cares were taken. Three lamas came from Tibet to manipulate the locals but failed miserable. A clash took place in Gazing between Lepcha - Limboo people and well-organized youth of Tibetan community which resulted into heavy killings and destruction of property of Lepcha – Limboo people.

This clash, on the other hand, was a pointer to two important developments. Both Lepcha and Limboo community for the first time jointly put resistant to Tibetan rule. This aggrieved sentiment of Lepchas against Tibetan usurpation of power was turned to be an acute inflammation in the body of Tibetan administration for the years to come.

Thus, since the 13th Century the forces outside Sikkim had laid bare the Lepcha community for their partisan interests. In the 17th Century this partisan attacks cornered them from all sides be it life around close hearth or the glittered space of royal court. The Lepcha nobles, unfortunate instruments of colonial expansion were also degenerated into stooge of oppression. So, the common Lepchas had to suppress their anger and anguish without a proper leadership to ventilate their grievances.

It is no denying a fact that there was Lepcha mass-based leader at all in the historical process of development of the community. At different times over different issues, the Lepchas tried to revolt against the then system of administration. The community also found some nobles or elites to guide and lead them to achieve their purpose. But the lack of insight on the part of the leader, difficulty in organizing the folk, insufficient training, difficulties in financing or collecting weapons might have been responsible in culminating all revolts into vain.

History witnessed a revolt by the Lepchas during 1642, when Phuntso Namgyal, the first Chogyal of Sikkim, was adorned with crown. It has been mentioned earlier that both Lepchas and Limboos jointly put resistant against the Tibetan coronation and as result violence and bloodshed took place at Gazing. This may be considered as the first revolt by Lepchas against Tibetan royal administration. The revolt was so spontaneous and instant that without so-called leadership the clash was broken out.

Historians sporadically mentioned Gaeboo Achyok Pano as the distinct leader among leaders to revolt against the Bhutanese aggression. No unanimity is being observed regarding the period of Gaeboo's leadership. But we can infer safely that during the last part of 17th and first part of 18th century, Gaeboo organized his garrison against the Bhutanese invasion in the eastern part of Lepcha land. Gaeboo had no good relation with the Chogyal of

Sikkim and sought help from Tibet. He was the Pano of Damsang area (presently under Kalimpong subdivision) and for long without much trouble had ruled the area. Ultimately, he was treacherously assassinated by the Bhutanese at Ambiok near Dalim fort (H.H.Maharaja of Sikkim, 1908).

Another Lepcha rebel leader Tasso Bidur, became powerful and stopped sending incoming revenues to the Chogyal of Sikkim from the Siliguri plain areas. He was the chief of Chakhung Dara, a fort near Oodlabari in the duars area whose relics are still in existence. He sought help from the neighbouring Magar chief for his rebellion against the Bhutanese ruler. But Yangthong Desit, a Bhutia noble, put down the insurrection of Bidur in 1725 (Pradhan, 1991). Details about Bidur's course of action, type of garrison, mode of fighting, method of organizing Lepcha supporters etc. were rare in the literature.

Chagzot Bolek, Lepcha kazi and chief minister and maternal uncle of the ruler (Tsughud Namgyal), had ultimately revolt against the Chogyal over the issue of oppression of Lepcha-Limboo community. The Bhutia intrigues led to the murder of Bolek and his family in 1820 at Rathu and Rayet (presently called rate and Buxakhola). Out of panic and tension, the Lepcha supporters of Bolek sought refuge to Ilam, Eastern Nepal (Dahal, 1984).

Traveling through the history it is thus clear that the concept of leadership among Lepchas is not prominent as it should be. The community at different phases had to pass through different and difficult strain and stresses for which leadership was inevitable to resist and safeguard the interest of the community. Among the leaders it was only Gaeboo Achyok who was successful in realizing the sentiment and the pulse of the Lepchas and got much popularity. Even today the community celebrates the birth anniversary of Pano Gaeboo Achyok mainly in Kalimpong areas.

Present day Leadership:

The Lepchas, once the sons of the soil, have lost all their influence over the land and community. The lords of soil become landless and daily wage earners. They not only lost Mayel Lyang but in course of time become citizens of three countries: India, Nepal and Bhutan. They are now the negligible minority in all three countries. Lepchas have completely converted from their nature worshipper to either Buddhism or Christianity. Religious conversion is responsible in creating all round change in Lepcha society. Christianity has created a wider gap between the past and the present than the Buddhism. The role and importance of Mun, Bongthing, Peeboo and other traditional Lepcha personalities are getting some respect and are used by the Buddhists. Lepchas now got some formal education but in the process they forget their own language, literature and script. They lost their old skill of weaving their own dress; constructing house, Cane Bridge; making ban-pok, ornaments and all they need in their life.

The Indigenous Lepcha Tribal Association is trying hard in preserving and protecting their culture, custom, tradition, religion, moo, language and literature. The Association provides various services to the society and also protects the community from outside attacks. It is the only forum where the members plan for the betterment of the community and keep the community united under one banner. All dialogues with both the Centre and State Governments are canalized through the Association.

The revival trend initiated by the Association is praiseworthy and is revolutionary in Lepcha history. But it is a havoc task and its success depends upon the involvement of all Lepchas: young and old, man and woman, rich and poor, literate and illiterate, rural and urban and ultimately Buddhist and Christian. No individual is responsible for the loss of land, religion, culture, custom, language,

literature and it can be regained and preserved by the Lepchas themselves. It absolutely rests on the Lepchas whether they are going to maintain their distinct identity for themselves and for the posteriority or prefer to merge with other dominant culture. Now, the revival process is on; the Association is trying hard to its best; the government should involve with due share; but it is ultimately the common Lepchas who through their active involvement and sense of belongingness can only pull the community and remove their day's old blame of '**Dying Race'** and prove that they should no more be identified as **'Vanishing Tribe'** but as the most '**Flourishing Tribe'** of the region. This revival of Lepcha community has been initiated by a good number of leaders whose dedicated and sincere hard work have started giving results and the Lepchas are finding some good days ahead. The present book attempts to find some such social revivalists and their course of action in nutshell. In the process revival of Lepcha language and literature at least two non-Lepcha personalities play prominent role. They are: Thikoong General G.B.Mainwaring and Dr R.K.Sprigg. The book incorporates the contributions of both the Lepcha and non-Lepcha personalities in reviving the Lepcha society. It is true that beside those personalities whom we have incorporated in this book there are so many other personalities whose contribution in no way be ignored but for obvious reasons we have limited ourselves within the main contributors. It is the modest first attempt and in future we may go with other personalities as well.

PANO GAEBOO ACHYOK
(1731 – 1781)

Pano Gaeboo Achyok
The Most Popular Lepcha King of Damsang Area

Early writings on leadership in Lepcha tribal community highlighted the Lepcha elites of Sikkim darbar as leaders of that community, such as, Rathup, Bolek, Chuthup or Satrajit, Bidur etc. However, their mass-base as leader is highly doubtful in spite of their administrative acumen and physical powers. These elites amassed huge landed property with royal blessing that created a wide gap between them and the poor Lepcha commoners. By nature, this type of leadership was self-centered – demagogic. These elites often used, though unsuccessfully at length, their fellow community people for attending specific self interests. Sikkimese history would provide evidence of such instances. Moreover, through the process of such assimilation of these tribal elites with the Tibetan colonial authority, they became detribalized and finally the pawns in the hands of Tibetan to perpetuate colonial rule.

Diametrically opposite was the leadership that was more organic in nature, to muster the fellow people for defending the community interests as a whole, barring any type of self interests on the part of the leadership itself. Here the approach and modalities of leadership are democratic and humanely in comparison to the former type. In Sikkim, the Tibetan rulers were felt at stake due to the presence of such leadership. This feeling of insecurity and anger was always traced in the relationship between the central administration, i.e. royal court of Sikkim and the people of southern frontier area.

Lepchas, the aboriginal people of the Eastern Himalayas has become the smallest section of the multilingual society and are declining. The dominant community of this region, with their values, customs and strength, almost absorbs this minority people

at present. But education and the resultant re-tribalisation process, though feeble, catch the whole community of Sikkim, Darjeeling and Kalimpong. And at this stage of progress, Lepcha community is seriously lacking leadership of its own.

Gaeboo As a Leader:

In the southern frontier areas of old Sikkim and the western boundary of earlier Bhutan (i.e. present day Kalimpong and its adjoining hilly terrain) Gaeboo Achyok was a very popular leader of the Lepchas. This geographical delimitation is one of the typical features of the leadership. But this delimitation never constricted his role as political leader of the area. Lepcha community that had been torn apart by internal and external bickering thought of resurrection through Gaeboo their hopes and dreams later mythify Gaeboo as messiah of Lepcha people.

The parentage of Achyok is obscure and as luck would have it doubt can also be raised regarding his area of action. Doubt and obscurity gain strength due to inability of sufficient written verifiable documents and excessive pressure of mythic emotion of the community. For absence of such concrete data and British colonial short sightness historians and travelers of the West and other native followers either disown the existence of such leader or make curtly note of such personality, but never give due historical importance to such person.

In the royal chronicles of Tibet, Sikkim and Bhutan, purposive mention had been made of Gaeboo. The ninth Chogyal of Sikkim, Thutob Namgyal, wrote a book, *History of Sikkim,* on the basis of genealogy and chronicles. This book remarks upon Gaeboo more than once. Although, he had never been a person under the patronage of Chogyal rather been an arch enemy to his rule. This also is true in regard to Bhutan chronicles (Hasrat, 1980). One American scholar (Aris, 1980) observes that an encounter between Gaeboo and Bhutanese authority is recorded during Bhutanese

invasion of Sikkim in 1668. Tibetan Chronicles, on the other hand, refers that Gaeboo Achyok seeks help from Tibet to resist Bhutan (Shakabpa, 1957). Herbart Risley, the British scholar and B.V.De Stocks established Gaeboo as mythical hero of the Lepchas (1928). Foning an erudite of Lepcha origin, tried to establish the historicity of Achyok (Foning, 1987). The emotive observations on Achyok by another local community scholar, K.P.Tamsang, can hardly be proved as historical evidence. In the later years some British historians and some modern day writers jotted down their information about Gaeboo Achyok (Hamilton, 1971, & Mathias, 1854).

Indira Awasthy, in particular, gives some space in her works to analyze the folktales of Gaeboo and its factual stake on the other hand, and psyche of the Lepcha community in and around Kalimpong on the other (Awasthy, 1978). This modest bibliographical review reveals two different views on Achyok. To some, Gaeboo was nothing more then a mythical hero of a community. Other analysts no doubt dealt with Lepcha people and Sikkim in its historical perspective but never acknowledged the existence of such person.

In the fact oriented analysis of local history and nature and evaluation of Lepcha leadership the character of Gaeboo is really unparalleled. Other dramatic personalities like Bolek, Rathup etc. of royal court of Sikkim, are elites rather than mass leader whose existence is delimited within the administrative rules and processes of the court. They have no place in the day to day life and dreams of the ordinary Lepchas. Moreover, their self interests are often exposed in the case of royal intrigue, matrimonial alliance and conflict over administrative power. In comparison to these Lepcha elites, Gaeboo's character is very much categorical, unostentatious and dedicated – who is community leader of far-flung southern border of Sikkim. Although people unsuccessfully

try to establish the royal lineage of Gaeboo Achyok his unkempt feature made him unique leader of the people.

The credit of mustering mass resistance against Bhutanese aggression went to Achyok which finally claimed his life. He obtained relentless mass support nay royal armed force. He became undisputed leader due to his selfless struggle for community goal and peoples support. His presence was also felt in the royal court of Tibet.

Period of Action:

There prevail great confusion and debate over the lifetime and life-work of Gaeboo Achyok. There are three sources where one can get information about him. Another source that delineates Achyok is the work of Lepcha people and local historians. Truly speaking, this fourth source of information is evidently poor and mostly the admixture of three main sources. The field interviews carried in different villages reveals the existence of a large body of hearsay evidence. This source, though hardly passed rigorous testing, proves the existence of a person named Gaeboo Achyok.

The Tibetan Chronicles is one of the three data sources. The book written by a former government official of Tibet, W.D.T.Shakabpa, provides scarce but valuable information in this regard. Michael Aris's book on the history of Bhutan regards Shakabpa as main data source.

According to this Tibetan source, Achyok (A-lcog) was appeared during first Bhutanese attack in Sikkim in 1668, i.e. during the reign of third Debraja, Chhoegyel Mijure Tempa (1668-80) of Bhutan. It is said that Achyok sought help of Tibet for weapons. Later on, sometime after the year 1675 or during the period of fifth Dalai Lama of Tibet, Bhutan again invaded Sikkim and had held under its rule the southern part of Sikkim. The Tibetan chronicles observed that Achyok was killed during this attack. In the background of such occurrences, it is revealed that

there persists grave enmity between the Lepchas and Bhutan Raj. It is not possible for the freedom loving Lepchas to accept the authority of Bhutan. Chronicles never says anything about Sikkim in this respect. Gaeboo took refuge to Tibet, not in Sikkim and ask for assistance. However, Sikkim's royal court was the nearest place for such purpose and the place was the part of Sikkim indeed. The southern fringe area was a distant land for Sikkim darbar for physical reason and the people inhabited this place (present day Kalimpong and adjoining areas) perhaps developed their own political identity distinctly separate from mainstream politics. Achyok's mingled with mass support reminds us of the old Lepcha tradition of 'Athing' (community leader). Shakabpa's narrative clearly delimits the life-time of Gaeboo in between the year 1668 to 1680.

The Bhutanese chronicle (Hasrat, 1980) differs from the Tibetan source both in respect of period and description of the incidence. It states that Achyok raised his rebellion against Bhutan during the reign of fourth, not third, Deb Raja of Bhutan, Gyalse Tenzin Rabgye (1680 – 2694). Describing the incidence it states Achyok either as Kirat or Mon (the people of the lower valley according to the Tibetans). Secondly, during this period, Gaeboo Achyok seeks Tibetan assistance that rejects Tibetan time frame. Thirdly, in order to suppress the revolt led by Achyok, Debraja Tenzin Rabgye drives him away from the country but is never responsible for his assassination. Fourthly, it is said that in the time of constructing a fort in Damsang area (presently in Pedong area of Kalimpong subdivision) Achyok puts his resistance against Bhutanese army. However, the time and credit of constructing this fort can not be easily ascertained or be given to someone without doubt. Later, either at the behest of Tibetan authority or armed assault Bhutan retreats back after marching over Rehnock. Both Tibetan and Bhutanese chronicles record this directive. Bhutanese therefore restrict the time of Gaeboo in between 1680 and 1694.

The Sikkimese documents offer different observations (Maharaja and Maharani of Sikkim 1908). The ninth Dharmaraja of Sikkim, Thutob Namgyal (1868 – 1914) himself regards Gaeboo Achyok as the contemporary to the Third Dharmaraja, Chagdor Namgyal (1700 – 1717). Chagdor returns back from Tibet in 1707. In the mean time, due to a conspiracy in the royal palace, Bhutan captures Sikkim, and after seven years of control, Bhutan leaves Sikkim as directed by Tibet. After the ascension of Chagdor in the throne, Bhutan again attacks Sikkim and permanently takes possession of southern portion of Sikkim. According to Sikkimese chronicle, this Achyok (to Sikkimese Shalngo Achhok) instigates to attack Sikkim second time. Achyok defies the rule of the king of Sikkim. Hence, for political reason, he takes shelter to Bhutan Raja. Later, he is killed treacherously by the king of Bhutan.

The conflicting issues identified in the Sikkim source are: a) unlike the Tibetan and Bhutanese observations, Thutob Namgyal frames Achyok as a recusant of 1700 A.D. b) Both Tibetans and Bhutanese identify him as a rebel against the rule of Bhutan. c) The name of Gaeboo Achyok also differs in Sikkim chronicles. The word 'Shalngo' is added to Achyok.

The fourth source of information as mentioned earlier is more folkloric rather than historic. Fairy tales, fantasy and above all ethnic emotion snatch the historicity of Gaeboo Achyok as found in other tribal literature of the world. To some, Gaeboo was a 'Half-breed Bhutanese' (Foning, 1987). The views noted by Mathias, observed that he was a prince whose origin was full of mystery, or he was a brother of king of heavenly Ramland, or he was the emperor without a crown, of south Sikkim (Hermann Mathias, 1954). Some local historians rather put him on the soil of the mundane world: Achyok was a son of a peasant family, etc. (Tamsang, 1954 & Tshering, 1971). It is difficult to ascertain fact from such views.

The above analysis of different chronicles and other sources of information lays upon, on the other hand, that there is confusion and debate over the historical chronology of the character of Gaeboo Achyok ; on the other hand, till date, no persevering attempt has been made to unequivocal treatment of the character. The word Achyok might be a title rather than a surname. And the chance of existence of more then one Achyok can not be ruled out.

One good cause for such negligence in analyzing the character of a popular leader of Lepcha community is perhaps the absence of any royal recognition. The royal court of Sikkim tries to make him a non-entity. In the course of circumstances, Gaeboo and his followers became a grave inflammation in the body of Sikkimese administration no doubt. Naturally he is simply looked down upon both by the Chogyal dynasty and Lepcha elites of Sikkim royal court as an angry churl of the south. For such reasons, the narrators and the historians either attach no importance to him or characterize him as a mythical hero out of unhistorical and twisted facts.

There are three opinions regarding the life time of Gaeboo Achyok. If one puts together there three periods the active part of his life would be more or less fifty years. Now if his age of adulthood is, say, twenty years, he died at the age of seventy. So, Bhutanese army killed a leader of seventy years of age by reason to quell a revolt. Such assumption addles the whole thing.

According to Tibetan records, Achyok was killed by Bhutanese in 1776 or sometime near the period. The Bhutanese records stated that he was driven out of the area for anti-national activities, but not killed. Perhaps under this emergent situation, Gaeboo asked for help from Tibet and Sikkim (Hasrat, 1980). Aris said in his book that Gaeboo sought help from the Gelug-pa government of Tibet. So the tribal leader who had been killed in

and around the year 1776 was compelled to leave his sanctuary by Bhutan in 1680. To Maharaja of Sikkim, Achyok was murdered by Bhutanese authority sometime between the year 1700 and 1717.

This confusion and contradiction in chronology of events can not totally be rectified in absence of distinct body of data. But the existence of a person named Gaeboo Achyok (whatever be the pronunciation of spelling) can not be hooted off.

Shakabpa's Tibetan records reveal that Tibet-Bhutan conflict is started around 1611. The causes of such conflict are probably the protection of trade route and other national interests. During the year 1743, Bhutan first attacks the people of Mon-pa tribe. In some sources, 'Amchok' or 'Ackok' is used in the place of Mon-pa, which is again phonetically much closer to Achyok. Moreover, in the writings of Jesuit fathers, Cabral and Cacella, the early missionaries, the north western frontier of Bhutan and south of Sikkim was inhabited by this Mon-pa tribes. L.A.Waddel adds that Tibetans call the Lepchas Monpo (Wessels, 1924). In the later years, during the Bhutanese invasion to Sikkim, the people of this community suffered a lot in the hands of Bhutanese. In the background such sufferings that continued for a long time, it is not difficult to justify the rising of a leader of Gaeboo's stature. It is natural that the accumulated perturbation ultimately gushes out for freedom.

Nevertheless, in the question of leadership Gaeboo reappears again and again at different periods of time. Facts at hand suggest that there might be more than one person named Achyok. Or, the word Achyok is not all a name but denotes a title. The 'Amchok' or 'Achok' community that resided in the frontier areas, as facts said, was the Lepcha community. Indira Awasthy opines that due to the negative effect of prevailing inequality in lama-dominated society in Sikkim the people of Lepcha community migrated to this area. So the writings of missionaries, Awasthy's observation and other scattered evidence suggest that

mass of Lepcha people live in the southern border of Sikkim for a long time. Another noteworthy fact is that the word 'Gaeboo' is synonymous to king or administrator. Gaeboo Achyok might then be the king or clan leader (Athing) of Amchok or Lepcha community.

In the Sikkimese source Gaeboo appeared almost three decades later than the Tibetan source. It can be inferred that the man who was killed in 1676 by Bhutanese never resurrected again. Bhutan forced, not killed, him to leave the area in 1680. To Sikkimese source he was killed after the year 1700. If one takes into account the time factor then it is possible to say that the man driven out in 1680 and the man killed in the later ages of 1700 may be the same person. Beside this, Lepcha people probably organized their rebellion from the early years which finally culminated into revolt in the years between 1680 and 1717. Bhutan tried to throttle this revolt by killing Achyok.

The critical analysis of chronicles and other data results into the following supplementary deduction:

a). Gaeboo Achyok is a historical figure, not a mythical which has observed by many. The factual history of this area for last three hundred years would be unsubstantial if scholars pay no attention to this man of mortal frame.

b). 'Gaeboo Achyok' is a title rather than a name. There are more than one individual in this name at different stages of history. There might have been at least two persons at different stages of anti-Bhutan agitation.

c). It is quite conspicuous through investigation that Achyok is assassinated by Bhutanese authority.

d). He is killed in Damsang fort or in any nearby place. This recreant act of Bhutan later give birth to many extra-mundane stories whose central figure is Gaeboo Achyok. This super-naturalism is still carried on by way of inheritance both by the Lepcha and Bhutanese community of that area.

e). Achyok was a leader of the Lepchas of a particular region. The data at hand more specifically demarcates his area of action: in the north up to Renock (at present under the state of Sikkim), in the south Damsang area, in the east up to Tagon La (at present near Paro of Bhutan) and in the west up to Raing (near Rambhi on the 31 a national highway).

The socio-economic condition of this area were different from the political headquarter of central Sikkim. By the way Gaeboo became a mythical and revered figure in this part of the country. Even at present Lepchas of Kalimpong area organize cultural function on his birthday (?).

f). Gaeboo, an outcast by birth, was never recognized by the aristocrats of Sikkim darbar. He had never been praised or been given any status. Chagdor Namgyal never, however, tried to save his people of this region from the oppression of Bhutan. A close look at this succession of events and interaction indicated that the relation between Sikkim and Achyok and his people was not in good terms at all.

g). At the later days Gaeboo Achyok had been regarded as a king but he was nothing but a mass leader of the Lepchas.

To conclude, the ways and methods through which the nature and form of Lepcha leadership is crystallized in Gaeboo Achyok are unique and require more in-depth analysis. The metropolitan concept of leadership will not crack the nut with its edge. Absence of any clear history of Lepcha community or any preserved document and biased documentation of historical events, on the other side, hamstring logical founding of the whole thing. Naturally, the historicity of Gaeboo has been questioned throughout the ages.

Gaeboo and his fellowmen revealed an extra-territorial existence of a community out of Sikkimese administrative zone. They tried to liberate this region from all sorts of colonial expansion. Perhaps there were few more Gaeboo Achyok before

and after the man who was killed in Damsang fort – but history remained silent till date.

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AATHING K. P. TAMSANG
(1915 – 1985)

Aathing K. P. Tamsang
Literary and Cultural Hero of the Lepchas

Diversification is the essence of the world and all communities have their own culture, custom, tradition, language etc of their own. It is the moral duty of each member of any community to follow and maintain his/her birth-inherited culture and transmit the same to the next generation. Culture is value free concept and each individual is morally binded to perform the culture of the community in which he/she is born and brought up. But the wave of modernization is a great threat to the culture and language of most communities particularly to the small and liberalized communities. In the name of modernization and consumerism most communities today are infected and tempted to initiate the culture and language of the west. In the process they do much harm to their own culture and language. A cultural leader tries to save the community from adopting the alien culture and language. With the aim of preserving, conserving and maintaining community culture, the leader adopts different measures to make the fellow community aware about their own culture. The leader should not only possess full knowledge about the community history, tradition, culture, custom, language etc but should follow them in his/her day to day life. Aathing K. P. Tamsang is one such cultural and linguistic hero among the Lepchas of Eastern Himalayan region.

Lepcha society is agriculture based. Now they have been marginalized and are forced to live in the remote corner of Darjeeling and Sikkim hills. They are basically naturalists by religion. Lepchas used to guide by their traditional customary law and rules and remained far away from the main land ways of life and civil orders. Lepcha society has passed through a number of changes due to their interaction with the outsiders. They were overran by the Tibetans, Bhutanese and Nepalese and also came in

close contact with the people from the plains. In the process they not only adopted alien culture, religion but started giving up their rich language. Now cent percent Lepchas have converted either to Buddhism (nearly 60%) or to Christianity (nearly 40%). Although the percentage of Lepcha language speakers has increased from 19.29 in 1981 to 33.78 in 1991 but the percentage of Lepchas not knowing their mother tongue is really alarming. The outside effect is so strong that few Lepchas are now guided by their traditional customary law.

Lepcha struggle for survival gave birth to the formation of Lepcha Association as early as 1925. The Association has been renamed as Indigenous Lepcha Tribal Association (ILTA). Even today ILTA is fighting hard for uplifting the community both economically and culturally. Several leaders within their capacity had tried and even today are trying hard for the cause of the Lepchas.

Aathing Kharpoo Tamsang popularly known as Aathing K.P.Tamsang was born at Bom, Kalimpong on 19 January 1915. He was the eldest son of Aathing Sando Tshering Tamsang, the founder President of Lepcha Association. He was born in the Lepcha cultured family and from his childhood he was grown up in the environment of Lepcha culture, language and religion. His father inculcated in him the sense of love for his community. Aathing K.P.Tamsang completed his school education up to IA standard from SUMI, Kalimpong. Aathing K.P.Tamsang died on 23 September, 1985 at Gangtok at the age of 70 years.

Aathing K.P.Tamsang was a cultural revivalist. He dedicated his life for the upliftment and preservation of Lepcha culture, custom and tradition. He was a Buddhist by religion but used to follow the days old Lepcha tradition of Bongthimism and Munism. He was a Lepcha by the true sense of the term. He did extensive research on Lepcha language, literature, culture, custom, traditions, folksong, folk-tale, medicinal plant and what not on the Lepchas. In fact, there was no branch of knowledge of the Lepchas

where Aathing K.P.Tamsang did not travel. But his main areas of action confined in Lepcha language, literature and culture. Due to his dedicated afford and contribution, K.P.Tamsang has been ornamented as *Aathing* which in Lepcha means lord and is a respectful term used for the notable personage.

Aathing K.P.Tamsang was a scholar per excellent. He enriched his ethnic knowledge through extensive field survey in the remote villages of Darjeeling and Sikkim and enhanced his theoretical base in association with renowned scholars like Prof Christoph Von Furer-Haimendorf, Prof Firth, Dr. R.K.Sprigg and others. He worked as research assistant to Dr. R.K.Sprigg in 1952 at the Department of Cultural Anthropology, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London. Holfdom Siiger (1967) consulted and acknowledged Aathing K.P.Tamsang in his work. Siiger wrote: "Mr Tamsang recorded on gramophone some of my Lepcha prayers, songs etc. In his spare time Mr Tamsang also provided me with much information, and kindly placed some provisional type written notes on the Lepcha culture at my disposal. Moreover, Mr Tamsang read my field notes from Sikkim, and made several comments on them. These comments will be found below in the appropriate places. I am greatly indebted to Mr Tamsang for permission to publish them and the most stimulating discussions I had with him. I may perhaps add here that he confirmed my own impression that we have not nearly exhausted the material found in Sikkim for the culture and religion of the Lepchas. May it be collected before it is too late" (Siiger, 1967). Siiger referred several times comments and contributions of Aathing K.P.Tamsang in both Part-I & II of his book.

Aathing K.P.Tamsang not only remained busy in his own work but also took keen interest in helping other scholars by providing true information about the Lepchas. He was very careful and believed that any incorrect information if recorded in black and white has the possibility of transmitting the same to others and ultimately carries wrong information about the community. He

experienced that “most of the facts I read therein are absolutely incorrect. They are badly worded, open to misinterpretations and dangerous to the interests of the Lepchas. It seems, they have written about the Lepchas by not diving deep into the real facts but have written superficially and externally on hearsay and market gossips of non-Lepcha guides, interpreters and informers who have belittled and disparaged the Lepchas prestige, honour and dignity by giving false information about the Lepchas and as such, most of the facts described about the Lepchas are all incorrect, baseless, ludicrous, bogus and mischievous” (Tamsang, 1983).

R.N.Thakur (Thakur, 1987) mentioned the contribution and help which he received from Aathing K.P.Tamsang while writing his book on the Lepchas. At least in three pages he referred and noted the opinion of Aathing Tamsang regarding the meaning of the term Lepcha, origin of Lepcha equivalent names for different objects of the region, names of villages dominated by the Lepcha etc. He also acknowledged the hard working nature of Aathing K.P.Tamsang for writing his famous book *The Lepcha-English Encyclopaedic Dictionary*. “Purposive conversation with Kharpoo Tamsang, a dedicated Lepcha scholar in his seventies living in one small room of a small pucca house on the slope of a Darjeeling valley about three kilometers from Darjeeling town is an unforgettable memory of real joy in life. Hundreds of pages, some in wrapped bundle and some lying scattered on his small table and wooden charpoy, of his Lepcha-English Encyclopaedic Dictionary to which he was giving his days and nights in the tranquil and serene lap of Darjeeling valley threw me into ecstasy. The world does not know about such gem lying in the jungle and thatch of this wonderland, that is – India” (Aachuley, 2001). Aathing K.P.Tamsang enriched Lepcha language and literature through his writings. Some of the writings have been published after his death either by his son, Ren Lyangsong Tamsang and Renyoo Mayel Clymit Sangdyangmoo, daughter - in - law or by the Indigenous Lepcha Tribal Association, Kalimpong. Followings are some of his major published works:

1. Tamsang, K.P. (1978). *Rongringthim: A Grmmar of the Lepcha Language*. Lyangsong Tamsang. (in Lepcha). Kalimpong.

2. Tamsang, K.P. (1980, 2009). *The Lepcha-English Encyclopaedic Dictionary*. Mayel Clymit Tamsang. Kalimpong.

3. Tamsang, K.P. (1982, 2002, 2008, 2009, 2011, 2013). *Lazaong*. Mani Printing Works. Kalimpong.

4. Tamsang, K.P. (1983, 1998): *The Unknown and Untold Reality about the Lepchas*. Lyangsong Tamsang. Luen Sun Offset Printing Co. Ltd. Hong Kong.

5. Tamsang, K.P. (1996). *Rong Lungtyen Sung: Lepcha Myths*. Lyangsong Tamsang. (in Lepcha). Kalimpong.

6. Tamsang, K.P. (1996). *Lepcha Proverbs*. Mani Printing Press. Kalimpong

7. Tamsang, K.P. (1997). *Rongdunggit Sung: Lepcha Folklore*. Lyangsong Tamsang. (in Lepcha). Kalimpong.

8. Tamsang, K.P., (1998). *Lepcha Proverbs with English Equivalents*. Mani Printing Press. Kalimpong.

9. Tamsang, K.P. (1999). *Rong Taom Sung*. *A Treasure of the Lepcha Moral Stories*. Indigenous Lepcha Tribal Association. Kalimpong.

10. Tamsang, K.P. (1999). *Pho Yu saa Chha-Lyu aan Thaambik saa Sukdum: Birds and Insect World*: Mr and Mrs D.Oldershaw. Nottingham. England.

11. Tamsang, K.P. (2004, 2011). *Glossary of Lepcha Medicinal Plants*. Indigenous Lepcha Tribal Association. Kalimpong.

12. Tamsang, K.P. (2004). *Rong Sung Gyom. Lepcha Folktales*. Indigenous Lepcha Tribal Association. Kalimpong.

13. Tamsang, K.P. (2010). Trees, Shrubs and Large Climbers found in the Darjeeling District, West Bengal and Sikkim. Indigenous Lepcha Tribal Association.

Among his publications two books deserve special mention from the angle of enriching Lepcha language. These are the evidences of dedicated, hard working and scholarly presentation of the writer. These books are: *A Grammar of the Lepcha Language* and *The Lepcha-English Encyclopaedic Dictionary.*

In the field of Lepcha grammar five publications are worth mentioning. They are: (i) *A Grammar of Rong (Lepcha) Language as it Exists in the Darjeeling and Sikim Hills* by G.B.Mainwaring in 1876; (ii) *A Descriptive Grammar of Lepcha* by Prabhakar Sinha for his Ph.D degree in 1966; (iii) *A Lepcha Grammar and Composition* by D.Luksom in 1981; (iv) *A Grammar of Lepcha Language* by Aathing K.P.Tamsang in 1978 and (v) *A Grammar of Lepcha* by Heleen Plaisier in 2007.

Heleen Plaisier reviewed the existing Lepcha Grammar and made a comparative analysis of the two grammars written by the Lepcha scholars. "Two outstanding Lepcha scholars Kharpu Tamsang and Dongtshen Luksom have both published grammar textbooks of Lepcha written in Lepcha, i.e. Tamsang (1978), Luksom (1981) as well as other studies. These grammar books should not be seen as comparative grammatical descriptions of the Lepcha language, but rather as language text books. Both books are of a prescriptive nature, apparently written with an audience of language learners in mind. Although both grammars appear to be based on Mainwaring's grammar of 1876, Luksom follows much less closely than Tamsang does and offers several original and insightful discussions and examples" (Plaisier, 2007).

Aathing K.P.Tamsang made his best contribution in his *Lepcha-English Encyclopaedic Dictionary* (1983). It is not only his best work but the outstanding work in the Lepcha language. Aathing K. P.Tamsang brought Lepcha language at par with any other language of the world and established the richness of the Lepcha language. A comparative study is made by Heelen Plaisier. "Several dictionaries of the Lepcha language have been compiled (Grunwedel, 1898; Cemjong, 1970; Kumar, 1978). Kharpu Tamsang's magnificent 'Lepcha English Encyclopaedic Dictionary' published in 1980, is indispensible to anyone working on Lepcha. In 1983, a 'Lepcha Hindi English Dictionary' was compiled by Dongtshen Luksom. In 1996, 'An English to Lepcha Dictionary' was published by the eminent Lepcha authors Ugen Shipmu, Karma

Lode Righimu, Naku Tshering Likmu and Dorji Wandi Kunchudyangmu" (Plaisier, 2007). But K.P.Tamsang's Dictionary is the excellent work not only in terms of volume covering more twenty six thousand entries but made a descriptive analysis of the words. The second edition of the book has come out in 2010.

Aathing K.P.Tamsang enriched Lepcha literature by his writings on Lepcha Folktales, Folklores, Lepcha Myths, Lepcha Moral stories. He was a true Lepcha and believed in Lepcha traditional culture. He visited remote villages of Darjeeling and Sikkim and collected these materials and naturally they are original and different from others. Lepchas have the practice of orally transmitting their traditional culture to the next generations. Aathing K.P.Tamsang tried to record this oral culture and saved them from extinction. The other books on Lepcha Folksong and Folktales are *Folk-lore and Customs of the Lap-chas of Sikkim* by C.De Beauvour Stocks (1925), *Lepcha Folklore and Folksongs* by Ren L.S.Tamsang (2008).

Lepchas are botanists by birth. They know the names of all plants, shrubs, bushes, and creepers of the region and their medicinal and food value. They possess the chemical knowledge of freeing poison from the toxic plant and make them edible. *Maondaok,* the village medicine man uses flowers, roots, barks, leaves etc of locally available plants for all sorts of diseases. But there was no record or written documents of such indigenous medicinal plants of the Lepchas. Aathing K.P.Tamsang is the first person who wrote *Glossary of Lepcha Medicinal Plants* in 1981 and it was published by Indigenous Lepcha Tribal Association after his death in 2004 and in 2011 the second edition came out.

Aathing K.P.Tamsang was a social revivalist. He strongly believed that a community can survive only by practicing his own culture and custom. Forgetting own culture is the other name of denying ones mother. He holds the view that "every Lepcha ought to know their own language, literature, customs, history etc. otherwise how one can say that I am a Lepcha" (Magazine, 2004).

His love and affection for the community fellow is reflected through his saying to his son and he advised him to “be brave, be bold, take courage, be proud that you are a Lepcha and proudly proclaim – I am a Lepcha, every Lepcha is my brother, say – the ignorant, the poor, the destitute Lepchas are my brothers” (Magazine, 2004).

His dedicated heart for the cause of the Lepchas and his close association with the common Lepchas made K.P.Tamsang the General Secretary of the Lepcha Association in late 1940s and he continued working for the upliftment of the Lepchas as General Secretary till 1951 when he left for Oriental and African Studies, University of London as a scholar. As General Secretary of Lepcha Association, Aathing K.P.Tamsang along with Rev. G.T.Sitling met Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, the then Prime Minister of India during the latter’s visit to Darjeeling in 1950s and submitted memorandum containing several demands of the community. After coming back from England he was elected as President of the Association on 13 June 1973. Aathing K.P.Tamsang occupied the post of President of the Association not by hereditary from his father Aathing Sando Tshering Tamsang who was the Founder President, but by his dedication and sincere service to the community. In fact, during his stay in England the workings of the Association were not functioning as expected and remained stagnant for some time and after his return from England he revived the Lepcha Association. He along with his nephew, Lapon S.T.Lepcha who worked as the Cashier of the Association, worked hard for the revival of the Association and for the revival of Lepcha culture, custom and introduction of Lepcha language in the schools. The long cherished dreams of Aathing K.P.Tamsang even today are relevant and are kept as the main agenda of the Association.

In recognition to his contribution to Lepcha language and literature and to remember him, two activities have been undertaken by the Lepchas in recent times in Kalimpong. One is the

distribution and felicitation of Aathing 'K.P.Tamsang Lepcha Language and Literary Award' and the other is 'Celebration of Aathing K.P.Tamsang Birth Anniversary'.

'Aathing K.P.Tamsang Lepcha Language and Literary Award' has been introduced by his son and daughter-in-law in 1996 and each year on the occasion of the birth anniversary of King Gaeboo Achyuk the Award is announced and distributed. The Award goes either to an individual or to the institution for his/her/their outstanding contribution in the field of Lepcha language and literature. The Award contains a felicitation and some cash which has increased from Rs. 5000/- to Rs. 25000/- during 1996 to 2013. The Award is a sort of recognition to the individual/institution in spreading Lepcha language and literature. The following personalities/institutions have been awarded with Aathing K.P.Tamsang Language and Literary award since 1996:

1996 – Dr. R.K.Sprigg, England & Ren Topden Salong, Dzongu, North Sikkim.
1997 – Ren Ong Tshering Lepcha, Riyon, Kalimpong.
1998 – Upper Pochaok Lepcha Night School, Pachaok, Kalimpong.
1999 – Ren Ugen Shipmoo, Gangtok, Sikkim.
2000 – Dabling Lepcha Night School, Dabling, Kalimpong.
2001 – Lower Byong Lepcha Night School, Byong, Kalimpong.
2002 – Sahaor-Om Lepcha Night School, Lyang Sa, Kalimpong.
2003 – Naok Hlo Lepcha Night School, Naok Hlo, Kalimpong.
2004 – Zo Lepcha Night School, Samthar, Kalimpong.
2005 – Sanong Char Lepcha Night School, Lower Marming Sittong, Kurseong.
2006 – See Loo Lepcha Night School, Mirik.
2007 – Prektaam Lepcha Night School, Kalimpong.
2008 – St. Joseph's School, Git-Dabling, Kalimpong.
2009 – The Lepcha Association, Illam, Nepal.
2010 – Ren Gautam Lepcha, Mamring, Sittong, Kurseong.
2011 – Yang Daang Lepcha Night School, Kalimpong.
2012 – Yang Gree Lepcha Night School, Kalimpong.

2013 – Pano Gaeboo Aachyok Lepcha Primary School, Doring Lungsyol.
2014 – Beegaa Lepcha Night School, Kalimpong

Pochaok Lepcha Night School started celebrating Aathing K.P.Tamsang Birth Anniversary at Pochaok, Git Dabling, Kalimpong. On the occasion they publish a journal 'Aathing K.P.Tamsang Souvenir Lepcha Magazine' annually in Lepcha language. Mostly the young of Pochaok and the nearby Lepcha Night Schools contribute articles, poems, short stories etc which are mostly based on Lepcha culture and tradition. The Souvenir is an avenue where the remote villagers contribute in the field of Lepcha literature. Such Endeavour is praiseworthy and notable. On the occasion of birth Anniversary, the organizers display different Lepcha artifacts, books, manuscripts, herbal medicine and different articles of traditional Lepcha culture. The simple function of remembering Aathing K.P.Tamsang turns into a function of preservation and conservation of Lepcha culture and it is a bold step on the part of the Lepchas. It helps in disseminating the knowledge of traditional Lepcha culture among the young of today. It is a simple step but unique in its kind and bears strong educative value in reviving Lepcha culture. Pochaok can well be regarded as a model village of the Lepchas.

No government organizations, Central or State, could ever recognize the contribution of Aathing K.P.Tamsang in the field of Lepcha language and literature. But he remains alive in the minds of the Lepcha people. No research work, even today, on the Lepcha language and literature can be completed without recognizing and mentioning the work and contribution of Aathing K.P.Tamsang. He was a true Lepcha and possessed a dedicated heart for the cause of the Lepchas which can be reflected from his letter to his son where he wrote "I love you ever so much, but I would wish you to die working for the Lepchas" (Tamsang, 2004).

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REN GYAN TSHERING SITLING (Lepcha)

Ren Gyan Tshering Sitling
The Writer of First Lepcha Primer

Rev. Gyan Tshering Sitling is credited for writing the Lepcha Primer, 'Rong Ming Hlaab Chhyo Kaat' in 1929. He is the first writer of Lepcha Primer for the Lepcha children. During those periods (first half of nineteenth century) a group of strong Lepcha personalities were working together and fighting for the introduction of Lepcha language in the schools and Rev. G.T.Sitling realized the necessity of a Primer for the Lepcha children. He possessed very good knowledge in English which helped him to write the Lepcha Primer based on Latin Grammar. The publication was financed by his elder brother, Dr Yen Sing Sitling and was printed by Mr. P. Knight at Baptist Mission Press, Calcutta. During those days only Serampur Press, near Calcutta had Lepcha Font and that was under the control of the Christian Missionaries. Being a Christian of higher status Rev. G.T.Sitling enjoyed the advantage of using the Missionary Press for printing in Lepcha Font. The original book contained 29 pages with necessary illustrations. Its price was 10 (Ten) paisa only. The book is well written and it is even used today and the reprint was made in 1957 and revised reprint in 1971, 2002, 2006, 2009, 2011 and 2013 by the Indigenous Lepcha Tribal Association. Till these days the first Primer is indispensible and considered the best among all other Primers available in the market. The Indigenous Lepcha Tribal Association took special care in publishing Lepcha Primer of Rev. G.T.Sitling and makes the book available in all Lepcha Night Schools for the Lepcha students.

The Lepcha Primer, 'Rong Ming Hlaab Chhyo Kaat' was forwarded by Dr. J.A.Graham, the founder of Dr. Graham's Homes,

Kalimpong. Dr Grahams wrote "I love and admire the Lepchas. They have been my warm friends for forty years. It will be to them an irreparable loss if they lose touch with their language which embodies the spirit of their past. There are many influences around them these days to destroy their individuality, and I am glad that my young friend and fellow worker, Mr. Gyantshering Sitling is, through his interest in the language, trying to counteract them". In the Preface, Rev. G.T.Sitling writes "this first Lepcha Primer is dedicated to my own people in the hope that its publication will help the present generation to preserve the language and traditions of our forefathers". This statement vividly expresses the mind set and love of Rev. G.T.Sitling for the Lepchas.

Rev. G.T.Sitling was a Lepcha in the true sense of the term and he felt sad to see the condition of the Lepcha language and the Lepchas who were losing their language, culture and everything in the name of development. Although he became Christian but realized the necessity of preserving Lepcha language and culture. In the Preface he writes: "If the public gives me necessary encouragement, it will be my privilege to issue other books in Lepcha". But except the Primer we are not finding any other books of Rev. G.T.Sitling. This may be because of the fact that his Primer could not find expected readers at that time and the author was disheartened or may be due to financial hardship he could not publish other books. But the most likely reason may be some ups and downs in his personal life during those days. Quoting Mission News, Dec. 1931, 64, C.L.Perry writes "Rev. G.T.Sitling, and most of his family, including his brother Passang Sitling, a catechist, his father Rev. Gora Sitling of Chhobo Church, and two teachers, left the Scottish Mission fold to join the Roman Catholic Church" (Perry, 1997). In the footnote Perry again writes: "the exact

reasons why the Sitlings joined the Roman Catholic Church are unclear. Neither Rev. G.T.Gitling nor his father Gora Sitling became priests. According to local informants Rev. G.T.Sitling had a vision which he felt was from God telling him to join the Catholic Church" (Perry, 1997). Rev. G.T.Sitling worked with the Church of Scotland and also became Pastor of Macfarlane Memorial Church, Kalimpong. There are many stories behind his joining Roman Catholic Church but the Lepchas strongly believe that Rev. G.T.Sitling could not bear the "unsympathetic and unsupportive views of Dr. Graham and the Church of Scotland in the recognition and introduction of Lepcha language in the schools for the Lepcha children of Darjeeling" (Tamsang, 2000). Although he held respectable post of Pastor in the Protestant Church but his love and affection towards his community did not allow his introspective mind to continue with those who neglects his own community. In protest he left all his association with the Protestants and joined Roman Catholic Church in 1933.

Rev. G.T.Sitling was a well educated and did his IA degree and one English Divinity course from the Saharanpur Theological Seminary. Rev. G.T.Sitling was one of the three candidates who accepted the English course introduced by Mr. Ogg before his departure in 1926. The vernacular course of study and examination for candidates for license and ordination within EHM was drawn up by Turnbull and Graham by the Eastern Himalayan Presbytery in 1885 but Rev. G.T.Sitling had opted English instead of vernacular course. This shows his interest and knowledge about English language.

Ren Tumlung Sitling, grandfather of Rev. G.T.Sitling came from Ilam, Nepal and was made main Sardar (Chief) by the British.

He was the main Sardar behind construction of the Macfarlane Church at Kalimpong. Ren Gora Sitling, father of Rev. G.T.Sitling was named Gora (means white skin) by the British as per the colour of his skin. Rev. G.T.Sitling was the fourth and the youngest son of Ren Gora Sitling. The Sitling family was closely associated with the British and converted into Christianity but they were well educated and placed highly in their life. Ren Augustine Sitling, son of Rev. G.T.Sitling was a science graduate from St. Jeviers College, Calcutta and used to write regularly in the Himalayan Observer, a News Daily published from Kalimpong. Rev. G.T.Sitling was a supporter of Congress party and actively involved in party works.

Rev. G.T.Sitling was actively involved with the Lepcha Association. He was one of the founder members of the Association and became the President of the Association after Renue David Babuni during fifty's of the last century. During those periods, the Association did not possess any building of their own and all routine works of the Association were carried out in a rent free house near present Crown Lodge of Kalimpong town. During his tenure as President of the Association Rev. G.T.Sitling worked hard in introducing Lepcha language in the School curriculum of Darjeeling district.

In recognition of his dedicated service to the Lepchas, the Lepcha Association in its meeting held on 25 and 26 May, 1973 awarded the title 'Noor Mayel' (Lepcha land Jewel) to Rev. G.T.Sitling. The other personalities who received 'Noor Mayel' were Duk Sing Namchu, Mrs. David Mohan (popularly known as David Babuni) and Sangkyol Tasso for their outstanding work and contribution to the Lepcha society.

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LOPAN SONAM TSHERING LEPCHA
(1928 –)

Lapon Sonam Tshering Lepcha
A Living Legend in the Lepcha Society

Lapon Sonam Tshering is the living legend in the Lepcha society. He is the man of true Lepcha culture and tradition. In fact, he is the main architect who revived and popularized Lepcha culture among the Lepchas of Darjeeling and Sikkim. He is the only person who is still popular and well respected in Mayel Lyang i.e.Darjeeling and Sikkim, the homeland of the Lepchas. Born in Darjeeling district, his area of activity has crossed the state boundary and he is equally rather more popular and prominent in the state of Sikkim. Lapon Sonam Tshering Lepcha is that personality who had inspired, inculcated and rejuvenated Lepcha culture among the present generation in the States of West Bengal, Sikkim and in Nepal. He can really be identified as the architect who has brought renaissance in Lepcha culture in the present century. The resurgence trend which Lapon set among the Lepchas has started giving fruitful result within very short period of time.

Born on 3 January 1928 at Bom, Kalimpong, Darjeeling, Lapon Sonam Tshering Lepcha possesses good heath and full energy. No Lepcha cultural events in Darjeeling and Sikkim have ever been organized without the active participation and involvement of Lapon Sonam Tshering Lepcha. A man of 86 years bears energy of 40 years and visit throughout the hills without any difficulty. His physical absence is compensated by songs, drama, act etc composed by him. He is a man of true Lepcha culture who composed more than 400 songs, 100 folk dance and 10 dance drama. He is a poet, writer, singer, lyricist and musician. All his songs, dramas and writings carry true Lepcha tradition and culture. His formal education was upto primary school standard but he remained one of the most ethnic educated person among the Lepchas of Sikkim and Bengal. The following books are at his credit and they vividly exhibit the mind set of the author and all the books are in Lepcha language.

i). *Lepchas and Their Musical Instrument* (1970).
ii). *Lepcha Folk Geet* (1977): Department of Education, Government of Sikkim.
iii). *Muk-Zek-Ding-Rum Faat* (Prayer to Mother Nature)
iv). *Tungroong Hlo Rum Faat* (Prayer and offering to Mount Tendong).
v). *Lyang Rum Faat* (Prayer and offering to Earth, Soil, Sun, Rain, Water, Air, Stone, and Local Deities).
vi). *Sakyoo Rum Faat* (Prayer and offering to Mayel Kyaong)
vii). *Tungbaong Rum Faat* (Prayer and offering to God and Goddess of Birth and Naming Ceremony).
viii). *Rangyoo-Rang-Eet* (A song and Dance Drama).
ix). *Nahaan Bri* (Song and Dance Drama).

Love and respect for Lepcha culture and tradition initiated Lapon Sonam Tshering to visit Lepcha villages in far off places during his young age. He thereby enriched his knowledge about Lepcha culture and custom from the common Lepchas. He collected the century old handwritten Lepcha manuscripts and compiled folk songs and folk tales. All his works are based on pure Lepcha culture and tradition. He revived and popularized the days old Lepcha culture and rituals like birth ceremony, death ritual, marriage ritual etc. Now his writings on birth, death and marriage are widely used by Bongthing and Mun, Lepcha priest and priestess. So long there were no written documents of any rituals for the Lepchas and the Mun and Bongthing were orally performing the rituals but with the decreasing number of Mun and Bongthing the Lepcha society started facing problem in performing these rituals. Lepcha society is casteless and as per Lepcha tradition, a person with fluency in mother tongue and well knowledgeable in their culture and tradition can perform the act of priest. The written booklets on common rituals help the Mun and Bongthing to follow Lepcha culture uniformely and make their works easy and simple.

During his tour in remote villages, Lapon Sonam Tshering Lepcha collected traditional Lepcha artifacts and established one Lepcha Museum. The Museum is located at Lepcha hostel, Baong Busty, Kalimpong and is the only Museum of this kind for the Lepchas. The Museum is filled with rare collections of manuscripts, musical instruments, hunting apparatus, earthen pitchers, stone materials, house replica, photoghaphs etc. All the artifacts are nature based and are made of bamboo, cane, wood, stone or earth. The Museum carries a complete picture of traditional life style of the Lepchas. The traditional life style shows simplicity and closeness of the Lepchas with nature. The Museum attacks tourists both national and foreign and is a treasure of information and documentation for the researchers on the Lepchas. It is the only museum of this kind and the entire credit right from the collection of materials to arrange and maintain those goes to Lapon Sonam Tshering Lepcha. It is simply fantastic and attracts both the domestic and foreign tourists, researchers, scholars and historians.

Lapon started his career as soldier in 10 Gorkha Rifles at the age of 17 in 1945 and served only eight month and nine days but could not remain outside home after the death of his elder brother in World War II. His love for Lepcha culture and tradition inspired him to form a cultural team with the young boys and girls at Kalimpong. He led the team to perform Lepcha cultural program in Calcutta during the Independence Day in 1949. The then Chogyal of Sikkim Sir Tashi Namgyal appointed Lapon Sonam Tshering Lepcha as organizer for Lepcha songs and dances of Sikkim in 1954. He led a troop of Lepcha dancer from Sikkim to Delhi in 1955 to perform cultural program during Indian Republic Day. At that time Sikkim was not a part of India. Lapon took part in the team who perform cultural program during the visit of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru at Darjeeling in 1956. The team was led by Renue David Babuni, the then Persident of the Lepcha Association and Lapon was a young artist then.

In recognition to his skill and contribution in cultural activities, the Government of West Bengal appointed him as Lepcha artist in Song and Dance Division, Department of Culture, Darjeeling in 1961. He was associated with the Cultural Department, Government of Sikkim and discharge the duty of training Lepcha song and dance to the youths of Sikkim. His association and journey with Lepcha culture continued and he started composing songs, giving tunes, playing music and what not in Lepcha culture. All his works are based on pure Lepcha tradition and culture. He believes that a man without culture is a man without backbone. He not only practice Lepchas culture for entertainment but work hard to spread pure Lepcha culture among his fellow tribes. Lapon is associated with different departments and committees of Lepcha Associations both in Darjeeling and Sikkim. He holds the post of Cultural Secretary of Indigenous Lepcha Tribal Association for long period. All the other portfolios went on changing on the basis of election but Lapon continued to be selected unanimously as Cultural Secretary of the Association.

Lapon Sonam Tshering Lepcha is the first editor of Aachuley, the only Literary Magazine in Lepcha language. In fact, he initiated and started the publication of the magazine in Lepcha language. It was then circulated in cyclostyled form from 02.0.1967 to 1969. He also helped Aathing K.P.Tamsang in a number of ways while the compiler was staying at Darjeeling and working on the Lepcha English Encyclopedic Dictionary. After his return from England when Aathing K.P.Tamsang revived the workings of the Lepcha Association and became its President on 13 July 1978, Lapon Sonam Tahering Lepcha became the Cashier of the Association. Later also he remained in charge of the Cultural unit of the Association for long periods and led Lepcha cultural team in different functions.

As a Chairman of Rong Shye-Zum (Lepcha Cultural Organization of Kalimpong), Lapon started celebrating the Birth

Anniversary of Pano Gaeboo Achyok, the last Lepcha king of Damsang in the year 1984 in Bom, Kalimpong. Thereafter the Indigenous Lepcha Tribal Association has been organizing the Anniversary in befitting manner each year on 20 December without any interruption. It is the most popular and successful programme of the Association where large number of Lepchas from all over Nepal, Bhutan, Sikkim and Darjeeling and rest of India assemble, get entertained and exchange their views.

The credit of reviving Muk-Zik-Ding-Rum-Faat and popularizing it among the common Lepchas goes to Lapon Sonam Tshering Lepcha. It is a worship of Mother Nature and each year before harvest Lepchas assemble at Reyon, Kalimpong to perform the ritual.

Lapon Sonam Tshering Lepcha is the person who revived Tendong-Lho-Rum-Faat as per Lepcha folk tale at Tendong Hills, Sikkim. He alone climbed the Hill and celebrated the Faat at the top of Tendong Hill for the first time in 1992. Later, in 1995 the Government of Sikkim started celebrating the Faat as state festival and declared 8 August as State Holiday. This is te only state holiday on Lepcha festival. The whole credit of recognition of the Day goes to Lapon Sonam Tshering Lepcha. The ILTA is also celebrating the Faat at Kalimpong and Darjeeling hills.

Lapon Sonam Tshering Lepcha is the composer, musician and lyricist of 'Achuley', the community Hymn of the Lepchas. The Lepcha Association of Darjeeling, Sikkim Councilor, all head priests, all village heads of Sikkim and Darjeeling appreciated his Hymn and accepted it as community song on 6 November, 1967.

Lapon Sonam Tshering Lepcha is a man of pure Lepcha tradition. He compiled the folk tales and folk songs which so long are in circulation orally among the common Lepchas. He revived Lepcha culture and makes them popular among the Lepchas. Folk tales of Teesta and Rangit, Tendong Hills are some such popular tales which are very commonly used by the Lepchas as their identity as original inhabitant of Eastern Himalayas. His folk tales

and short stories are included in the text book up to secondary level in Sikkim and are published by the Government of Sikkim and ILTA.

Lapon Sonam Tshering Lepcha possesses a gifted tune. Even at the age of 86 he sings so elegantly that it entertains not only the Lepchas but other communities as well. His band of disciples has spread all over the country and is doing havoc in popularizing Lepcha songs. His knowledge of Lepcha history and tradition gives some extra flavour in his composition and most of his writings are patriotic and communal in character. He revived the typical tune of Mun and uses it in his songs. His rhyme and rhythm are typical and possess original Lepcha culture and traditions. He is credited for reviving the 'Aprya' and 'Palu' – the two forgotten tunes of the Lepchas. His cassette on Lepcha song is popular and widely used by the common Lepchas of Darjeeling and Sikkim. He encourages the young Lepchas to follow pure Lepcha culture and tradition. He uses song and drama as medium to inculcate the community spirit among the fellow tribes. He is an ever green teacher per excellence and is commonly known as 'Lapon' which in Lepcha means — a teacher, a guide, a trainer or an instructor.

In recognition to his contribution towards Lepcha culture and tradition, he was honoured with different awards:

1. He is the winner of 'Pantong Palit' (Lepcha Folk Flute) Competition in 1956.

2. For his high standard of work and excellent achievement in preserving Lepcha culture and custom, the District Lepcha Association, Darjeeling honoured him with 'Nur-Mayel-Kohom' and 'Nur-Mayel' award in 1973.

3. For his outstanding contribution to Lepcha culture, the Department of Culture, Government of Sikkim honoured him by presenting a Citation in 1995.

4. The Sikkim Lepcha Association honoured him with G.B.Mainwaring Award in 1996.

5. Lapon Sonam Tshering Lepcha received the prestigious Sangeet Natak Academi Award from the President of India at Rastrapati Bhavan, New Delhi on 18th December, 1996. This was as per recommendation of Government of Sikkim for his lifelong contribution towards preserving and reviving Lepcha culture and tradition. The Award is in the category of Tribal Music for his outstanding contribution in 'Satsang and Tambok', the traditional musical instrument of the Lepchas.

6. Lapon Sonam Tshering Lepcha received the highest and most prestigious National Award Padma Shri, 2006 and he received it from the Hon'ble President Dr. A.B.J. Abdul Kalam at Rastrapati Bhavan on 5 April, 2007. Lepchas are proud of Lapon Sonam Tshering Lepcha who also dedicated the Award to the common people.

7. Lapan Sonam Tshereing Lepcha is the recipient of West Bengal Government's award, Banga Bhibhusan in 2014. It carries a citation and cash prize of Rs. two Lakh.

8. Lapon received Sangit Samman in 2013. It is an award of Government of West Bengal and is given for his out standing contribution in folk music and song. It carries a citation and cash prize of Rs. Fifty Thousand.

9. Lapon Sonam Tshering received Rabindra Ratna in 2013 from the Chief Minister Ms. Mamata Banerjee. It is a state government award and carries a citation and cash prize of Rs. three Lakhs.

Lapon Sonam Tshering Lepcha is an institution by himself. Such a versatile, dynamic, resourceful and multifarious personality is rare in any community. He is a man of pure Lepcha culture and tradition. He is a writer, a poet, a composer, a lyricist, a musician, a historian, an archaeologist, a social worker, a revivalist, a bongthing and above all a pure Lepcha man with simplicity, honesty and dedicated soul for the cause of the Lepchas. He never took any teaching or training from any teacher but he is excellent in song and music. In fact he is a born singer and musician. He is really a gift to the Lepchas. We pray to the Almighty for his long life and good health and expect that he will go on contributing many more things to the community.

REN LYANGSONG TAMSANG
(1944 –)

Ren Lyangsong Tamsang
The First Chairman of
Mayel Lyang Lepcha Development Board

Born on 21 March, 1944 at Bom, Kalimpong, Ren Lyangsong Tamsang is the eldest son of Aathing K.P.Tamsang, the pioneer of Lepcha language movement. After retiring in the post of Major in the British Army, Ren Tamsang settled permanently in his ancestral land at Bom, Kalimpong. He started working as the editor of 'Aachuley' and 'Gaeboo Aachyok Birth anniversary News Magazines' since 1995. These two magazines later became the mouthpiece of the Lepchas. The common Lepchas get an avenue to see their compositions in printed form which play an important role in reviving the Lepcha language.

Ren Lyangsong Tamsang was born in a Lepcha cultured family and like his father and grandfather devoted himself for the cause of the Lepchas after his retirement from the service. He held the post of General Secretary (2000 – 2006) and later President (from 2006 to Aug., 2013) of the Indigenous Lepcha Tribal Association and changed the nature of workings of the Association. His able leadership familiarizes Lepchas in the outside world and took the demand of the Lepchas to the top leaders of the country both State and Central Governments. Because of his long stay in the overseas, Ren Tamsang is very polite, well mannered, firm and fluent in English which gives him extra advantage to negotiate with the high officials of the country. His proficiency in mother tongue and command over Nepali, Hindi, English, helps him to make a good leader. During his tenure the Lepchas for the first time came to the street both in Darjeeling district and at Kolkata, Delhi, Sikkim and could organize several rallies, dharnas, hunger strikes, processions, long march etc on several issues including the demand of recognition of their language. He could

manage to get the assurance from the government for the introduction of Lepcha language in the government primary schools of Darjeeling district. A long cherished demand of autonomous board by the name 'Mayel Lyang Lepcha Development Board'(MLLDB) has been materialized from 3 September 2012 and Ren Lyangsong Tamsang has unanimously been chosen as the first Chairman of the Board from August 2013. Under his able leadership forty five Lepcha Night Schools have been opened to impart the four skills of Lepcha language. He arranged the volunteers of Africa Asia Venture (AAV) to stay at Lepcha villages and teach the English language to the Lepcha children.

Ren Lyangsong Tamsang is not only an efficient ethnic leader who can address the gathering in community language, he motivated and united them under Rong Taarshyaok, the Lepcha Flag. He is a profound writer, translator, editor and efficient composer of the Lepchas. Besides editing single handedly two important magazines 'Aachuley' and 'King Gaeboo Aachyok Birth Anniversary Magazine' since 1995 without any interruption, the followings books and articles are at the credit of Ren Tamsang:

Books:

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Mainwaring's 188th Birth Anniversary Celebration and Recovery of the Lepcha Language, Literature and History. Souvenir. 18 July.

Ren Lyangsong Tamsang is a retired and pension holder but he is a full time dedicated personality for the cause of the Lepchas. Since he came back to Kalimpong from his service in the British Army, he entirely devoted his time and energy for the upliftment of the Lepchas. He believes that the language is the most important factor for any community and it is through language a community can be identified and recognized. After joining the Lepcha Association he brought many changes and introduced many things for the betterment of the Lepchas. Some such notable works are:

a). The publication of 'Aachuley' and 'Gaeboo Aachyuk News Magazine' since 1995.

b). Introduction of 'K.P.Tamsang Lepcha Language and Literary Award' entirely out of his own fund.

c). Publication of different books, booklets, periodicals, primers, text books etc in Lepcha language.

d). Opening of 45 Lepcha Night Schools in the remote Lepcha dominated villages.

e). Celebration of Gaeboo Aachyok Birth Anniversary each year on 20 December.

f). Celebration of different Lepcha rituals and cultural festivals like Muk-Zik-Ding Rum Faat, Lyaang Rum Faat, Tendong Lho Rum Faat, Chu Rum Faat, Sakyoo Rum Faat, Naambun etc.

g). Arranging foreign fund for the construction of Rong Lee, bridge, road, water connection etc for the Lepchas in the remote villages.

h). Arranging Asia Venture volunteers for teaching English to the Lepcha children in the remote villages.

i). Leading the Lepcha delegates to meet different political leaders, ministers and government officials at different levels.

j). Leading the Lepchas in different Dharnas, Strikes, Rallies, long march and other movements.

k). Unanimously chosen as the first Chairman of the newly formed Mayel Lyang Lepcha Development Board.

Ren Lyangsong Tamsang has unanimously been chosen as the first Chairman of the Mayel Lyang Lepcha Development Board and is working hard for the upliftment of the Lepchas. He is really shouldering the huge responsibility of framing the Board and fulfilling many aspirations of the indigenous Lepchas of West Bengal. Ren Tamsang is a perfect Lepcha and always wears Daampraa, Lepcha male dress and Thyaaktuk, Lepcha hat. I personally know him since 1997 but I have never seen him even for a single day in casual dress other than in Daampraa and Thyaaktuk. Truly speaking I may not recognize him without his traditional ethnic dress and the Lepcha hat.

The revival of Lepcha language which was started by his father Aathing K.P.Tamsang has further intensified and get a fresh momentum as per the need of the time by his son, Ren Lyangsong Tamsang. He really fulfills the aspirations of his father who in one letter wrote to him once "I love you ever so much, but I would wish you to die working for the Lepchas". In recognition of his effort in reviving, maintaining, promoting and developing the Lepcha language and literature, Ren Lyangsong Tamsang has rightly been awarded with 'Rastriya Lok Bhasha Samman' in 2001 by Gandhi Hindustani Sahitya Sabha, Rajghat, New Delhi. Ren Tamsang received the award from the Hon'ble Union Minister for Agro and Rural Industries, Shri Karia Munda on 24 March 2002. The Akhil Bharatiya Adivasi Vikash Parishad also honoured Ren Lyangsong Tamsang with the "Bir Birsa Munda National Award" for his outstanding editorial works in November 2006 and it was presented to him by the National President, Shri Somjibhai Damor, Akhil Bharatiya Adivasi Vikash Parishad amid one hundred thousand Adivasis at Nagpur, Maharashtra.

REN P.T. LEPCHA (SIMICK)
(1943 –)

Ren P.T.Simick
A Pioneer Lepcha Cultural Revivalist

Lepcha leadership, like those of leadership among most of the tribes of the world, is different from the modern urban-based political leaders. Like tribal leaders the Lepcha leaders are guided by their ethnic ethos. There are different boundaries of Lepcha leadership – religious boundary, linguistic boundary, customary law boundary, folk-tale and folk-song boundary etc. The traditional cultural ethos remains the main driving force of Lepcha leadership. In fact, there is no equivalent word for leader or leadership in the Lepcha language. The similar words like *Aabo, Aathing, Thing* are the positional or status leaders. *Aabo* means father; *Aathing* means lord or master and *Thing* means land lord. None of them is leader in the modern sense of the term but they guide and direct the people for the cause and development of the community.

Lepchas are little known community of the Eastern Himalayan region and mostly inhabited in Sikkim and Darjeeling hills. Prominent Lepcha personalities play key role in introducing the community at the national and international level and attacks attention of the rest of the world. One such dynamic, energetic, vibrant, resourceful, multi-talented and versatile Lepcha personality is Ren Passang Tshering Simickmo Lepcha of Ngasey who is popularized by his short name Ren P.T.Lepcha or Ren P.T.Simick.

Born on 12 August 1943 at Ngasey Busty, Kalimpong, Darjeeling, Ren P.T.Simick did his primary schooling from Kalimpong. He is a pensioner of Central government employee and worked in the department of SIB at Kalimpong Office and retired in 2003. His father late Sai Tshering Lepcha was a resident of Ngasey Busty and they are Buddhist by religion. He belongs to Simikmoo and as per the Lepcha folk-tale Simikmo is one of those ten moos

whose clan originated by killing the demon Lhaso Mung. As per the folk-tale the man who pierced the eyes of the Mung was given the clan Simikmoo and Ren P.T.Simick is proud of belonging to one such clan who helped in killing the demon and saved the community in the ancient days.

Ren P.T.Simick is the only personality among the Lepchas who have received the prestigious Bhasa Samman Award from Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi on 12 August 2001. Incidentally, this date of receipt of Bhasa Samman coincides with his birthday so he considers his birth day as a blessed day. The Award carries a plaque and cash prize of Rs 25000/-. Among other works, the Bhasa Samman Award was received for his remarkable work 'Maayel Pundoor' meaning the Hidden Treasure.

Originally, Sahitya Akademi used to give annual awards to books of outstanding merit and annual prizes for outstanding translations in the recognized 22 languages. But later the Akademi felt that in a multi-lingual country like India where hundreds of languages and dialects are present, Academi's activity should not be limited only within the recognized languages but should be extended beyond the recognized ones by acknowledging and promoting literary creativity as well as academic research in the other languages. Therefore, from 1996, the Akademi has introduced Bhasa Samman award to writers, scholars, editors, collectors, performers and translators who have done considerable contribution to the propagation, modernization and enrichment of the concerned language. Every year the Samman is given as per the recommendation of the expert committee.

Beside Bhasa Samman, Ren P.T.Simick received the following awards:

- Sukriti Award from D.I.B., Government of India in 1987.
- Gunjal Award form Cultural Department, Government of West Bengal in 1997.

Most of the books written by Ren P.T.Simick are in Lepcha language. The followings are some of his writings:

- Rong Lungten Choak Sung (Beginning of the Lepcha Cultural Tradition).
- Ling Gaeboo Sung (Story of a Hero of the World).
- Saryaok Sung Part I and II (Tales of a Clever Jackal).
- Aanum-Eying Mun Ryakboo Sung (Tale of two Hunters).
- Tashey Gyalaom Sung (Tale of Tashey Thing).
- Tafef Sung (Tale of Pumkin, Tafef).
- Rumfun Fo Sung (Tale of a Bird, Rumfun Fo).
- Lavo Fron Thoop Sung (Folklores of Lunar months).
- Kawoo Fo Shyot (Lamentation of a Bird, Kawoo Fo).
- Simick Gomboo (Religious tale of Simick Gomboo).
- Mayel Pandor (Lepcha Treasures).
- Ung aan Mi saa gyen Kao Sung (Water and Fire Discussion).
- Lamen Sung (Unsocial Family members).
- Ta-Laom-Purtaam Sung (Story of Lepcha Ladder to Heaven).
- Nye Mayel Nungyaong pam (Vegetation and Insect World).
- Saong Gyao Namthao Chyyo (Introduction of Lepcha Holy Books).
- Nyaom Aasek Aavyet Sung (Lepcha Marriage).
- Raong Sung Gyaom (A Collection of Lepcha Folk Tales).
- Ckkakpaom Chhakdaong (A Collection of Lepcha Poems).
- Gitanjali (A translation work of poems of Rabindranath Tagore).
- Lepcha Calender – 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013.
- Lepcha Nomenclatures in Maayel Lyaang.

Ren P.T.Simick re-copied the following Lepcha ancient manuscripts by using the same Lepcha traditional style:

- Doshi Chhyo (Religious Tales of Salvation).
- Nyolik Nyosong (Origin of Human being).

- Takfil Naamthao (Religious Discussion between an Ant and a Priest).
- Trimik Kunden (Religious story of a King, Trimik Kunden).
- Rum Kaa Song hu (Methods of Offspring's of the God).

In 2012, the Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage in collaboration with the Indigenous Lepcha Tribal Association (ILTA), Kalimpong for the first time has published three Lepcha manuscripts in Lepcha with their English translation. Ren P.T.Simick played a key role in translating these books. Followings are the three books of rare publication:

- Nyaolik Nyaosaong Mun, Zaor Boongthing aun Chyee saa Aaeet Sung (Nyaolik Nyaosaong Mun, Zaor Boongthing and the origin of Chyee, the Lepchas' Fermented Beer).
- Chhyoten Munlaom (A Lepcha Manuscript of Prayers and Prophecies).
- Kumya Kumsyee Chhyo (A Lepcha Manuscript on Morals and Ethics).

Ren P.T.Simick is an expert in Lepcha language. Translation of Gurudev Rabindra Nath Tagore's Gitanjali, the Nobel Prize winning book, in Lepcha is one of the remarkable works of Ren P.T.Simick. It took nearly nine months to translate 17 poems of Gitanjali in Lepcha. Beside his mother tongue Lepcha, Ren P.T.Simick knows Bengali, Hindi, English, Nepali and Tibetan which helped him to translate Gitanjali from Bengali into Lepcha. It is a transliteration work in Lepcha and Bengali version of Gitanjali. Ren L.S.Tamsang, President of ILTA in his introduction to the book wrote "P.T.Lepcha, Bhasa Samman Awardee, a Bongthing, Lepcha priest, has done an outstanding work in translating Gurudev Rabindra nath Tagore's 'Gitanjali' into Lepcha. His poetic expression, are perhaps of the finest in the Lepcha literary world today..... It has certainly given a taste of Lepcha and Bengali words, sounds and tones to a reader'. (Simik, 2006). Translation is not an easy work and need to maintain the sense of the author and Ren P.T.Simick did it extensively. In the

introduction, Ren P.T.Simick wrote "Plunging into the words, songs, poems, thoughts, prayers, knowledge, foresight, reasons and wisdom of Gurudev in Gitanjali, I find, it too reflect the Lepchas ancient traditions and beliefs. If we, the humans could only distinguish very clearly between the good and bad, right and wrong, moral and immoral, true and false and take the right path, then this world of ours will always be full of happiness, joy and enduring friendship" (Aachuley, 2012).

Another comprehensive and remarkable work has been done by Ren P.T.Simick by collecting and compiling the "Lepcha Nomenclatures" of major places, mountains, rivers, cliffs, lakes, hills, hillocks, high hills, flat land etc in Mayaal Lyaang, the Lepcha land. In the forward of the book, Ren L.S.Tamsang, the President of ILTA wrote the need of the book. "Owing to tremendous increase in population, immense outside adverse linguistic, cultural and religious influences, effects and pressures on the one hand and sheer neglect of the ancient and rich Lepcha language, literature and traditions and culture by majority of the Lepchas themselves on the one hand, hundreds of beautiful Lepcha names places, mountains, hills, rivers, lakes, dales, valleys etc with authentic meanings befitting the places are slowly but surely being distorted. It is even more painful and sad to observe that most Lepchas, today, are blindly producing and pronouncing the distorted version of the original Lepcha names" (Simik, 2013). Regarding Ren P.T.Simick, Ren L.S.Tamsang further stated "A widely travelled Lepcha scholar with an immense zeal and interest in his language, literature, culture, tradition, history, Namtho Naamthaar, the ancient Lepcha manuscripts and a renowned Boongthing, Lepcha priest, Ren P.T.Lepcha has done a thorough research work on the original Lepcha names of places, mountains, hills, cliffs, caves, valleys, rivers, streams, lakes, villages etc and documented them for posterity and above all he has saved many original Lepcha names from local disintegration and oblivion" (Ibid). L.A.Waddel in

1891 and K.P.Tamsang in 1980 has documented some original Lepcha names but Ren P.T.Simick's book is more extensive, comprehensive and listed more names than the earlier two authors. This documentation is praiseworthy and will help the posterities to know the original form and pronunciation.

The other publications of Ren P.T.Simick are original, authentic and reflect the true Lepcha culture, custom, religion, beliefs and traditions. Most of his writings are in Lepcha language which shows his in-depth knowledge and command over his mother tongue and traditions. Among his writings, Mayel Pandor is important and receives the Bhasa Samman Award. The other works like Raong Sung Gyaon, Chhakpaom Chhakdaong, Ling Gaeboo Sung are extraordinary, notable and can be considered as valuable assets for the Lepchas. These books help in preserving the Lepcha language, culture, tradition and religion.

Ren P.T.Simick is a Boongthing, Lepcha priest. In the Lepcha society anybody who is well versed in Lepcha language and well acknowledged in Lepcha custom, culture, folktale can perform the activity of the priest. All functions and ceremonies in Lepcha society starts with Chi Faat i.e. offering Chi, the community liquor to Mt Kanchenjunga, the mother deity of the Lepchas. Ren P.T.Simick is performing the duty of the Boongthing in most of the functions organized by ILTA and offers Chi Faat to the community deity. He remains the leader during the celebration of Naambong, Lepcha New Years in his own village, Ngasey Busty.

Ren P.T.Simick acts as Peeboo or Byekboo and extends the service of go-between or the matchmaker for the groom and bride party in their marriage. Peeboo is respected in the Lepcha society and performs the necessary duties, rites and rituals to link the two persons in matrimonial relations. Ren P.T.Simick extends his service in binding innumerable couples in marriage and thereby contributes enormously in saving the community from intra-community marriage. His act as linkman between the newly

married couple and Tarbongthing and Narip Naom, the first couple in Lepcha society, has been well accepted and remembered by the community. Ren P.T.Simick seeks blessings from the almighty and the first Lepcha couple for a happy conjugal life of the newly married couple. For his respectable service, a Peeboo is always respected in Lepcha society and Ren P.T.Simick has acquired his popularity and respect for his dedicated, committed, enthusiastic and voluntary service to the society.

Ngasey, the birth place of Ren P.T.Simick is a model village for the Lepchas. In spite of its proximity near the town and market place, the able leadership of Ren P.T.Simick helped the village to maintain the sanctity, purity and sacredness in Lepcha traditional culture, custom and belief. Each year, 16 November is observed as Naamtho Naamthaar Day of the Lepchas at Ngasey. The leader used to teach the typical style of reading Naamtho Naamthaaar, the traditional holy book of the Lepchas. Youngs of today assemble from far and nearby villages to get the training of typical tune in reading the Lepcha holy book. Ren P.T.Simick started archery competition at Ngasey village and it is continuing uninterruptedly since 1960. Namboon, Lepcha New Year is observed with full dignity at Ngasey under the able leadership of Ren P.T.Simick. All Lepchas irrespective of their religious bias took part in Namboon and as Boongthing Ren P.T.Simick takes the leadership in observing the Day in typical traditional style and glamour. He is the community leader of Ngasey village and is respected by all in the village.

The habit of collecting old manuscripts takes Ren P.T.Simick to move from one remote village to another remotest one in the entire Lepcha dominated areas of Sikkim and Darjeeling hills. His collections of Namthoo Namthaar, the old traditional Lepcha Manuscripts, are the mines for the researchers on Lepchas. These are the source of all sorts of Lepcha knowledge and reflect the richness of the culture and custom of the Lepchas. Ren P.T.Simick

has built up a museum of Lepcha manuscripts at his house. The old manuscripts are in deplorable condition and Ren took the pain in rewriting some of these manuscripts in the same Lepcha style. He tried to keep and maintain the ancient touch of the manuscripts by using the handmade paper and ink. Three such manuscripts have been printed and published by the Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage in collaboration with the Indigenous Lepcha Tribal Association, Kalimpong in 2012. Ren P.T.Simick plays leading role in the publication and thereby saved the Lepcha culture from vanishing. In fact he does not believe in vanishing Lepcha culture and custom and dedicated his whole life in promoting, preserving and uplifting Lepcha culture, custom, belief and religion.

Under the initiative of Ren P.T.Simick, one Lepcha Night School has been started at Ngasey. All Lepchas both boys and girls, young and old attend the school and learn the four skills of Lepcha language and literature. Lepchas have their own alphabet and literature but it is still to be recognized by the West Bengal government as one of the languages in the primary and secondary level school curriculum. The ILTA has taken a drastic step in opening nearly forty such Lepcha Night Schools where Lepcha language is being taught. Ren P.T.Simick initiated and was successful in extending Lepcha education among the Lepchas of his village. The dream of Ren P.T.Simick has come true and now most Lepchas of Ngasey are well versed in their mother tongue. Ren P.T.Simick is discharging the duties of the Secretary, Lepcha Language Board Examination and discharges several duties like preparation of syllabus, study materials, conducting examinations, preparing results and give out report cards to all the successful candidates each year. The Board is working under the guidance and maintenance of ILTA but Ren P.T.Simick remains the key person and single handedly operate the Board.

Ren P.T.Simick is a man who possesses tremendous knowledge about the medicinal plants of the region. Being a

Boongthing, he not only knows the plants of the region but also knows their medicinal values. Before going to any doctor for treatment, most villagers of Ngasey consult Ren P.T.Simick for indigenous herbal treatment. His indigenous knowledge on medicinal plants cures many patients. Ren P.T.Simick has turned his house into a clinic where roots, fruits, leaves, barks of different plants are preserved either in dry or dust form. His service to the society is recognized by the nearby villagers both Lepchas and non-Lepchas.

Ren P.T.Simick held the post of Literary Secretary in ILTA for several years and General Secretary of the Association. At present he holds the post of Executive Member and looking after the literary section of the Board. As a portfolio holder of the Association and Board, Ren P.T.Simick used to visit different villages for different purposes and keeps close contact with the fellow tribe. As a Secretary of the Association, he needs to meet both the state and central government ministers, bureaucrats and officials for different purposes. His role during different Lepcha movements particularly during the movement for recognition and introduction of Lepcha language in the primary schools in Darjeeling, movement against the construction of hydro-electrical projects in Dzongu, north Sikkim, Lepcha Rights movement for Lepcha Development Council etc are notable and praiseworthy. Command over his mother tongue, knowledge of Lepcha tradition and culture, fluency in other languages like English, Hindi, Bengali, Tibetan and Nepali helped him to talk hours together on any issue related to the Lepchas. He is a good speaker and can spell-bound the audience with his charismatic voice. Under the able leadership of Ren P.T.Simick, the Lepchas of Darjeeling district is fighting hard for their ongoing demands in uplifting their culture, custom, religion, language and tradition.

Ren P.T.Simick is a perfect Lepcha person. He always wears Daampraa, Lepcha male dress and Thyaaktuk, Lepcha hat. The hat,

which he prefers to wear, is known as Papree Thyaaktuk and it is made of bamboo strips. It is a fine example of Lepcha handicraft. He loves Chi, Lepcha community drink and also prepares it especially with extraordinary care at home. He is a composer of Lepcha song and gives tune to his own songs. His knowledge of Lepcha music is admirable. He is the expert in tuning the four-hole flute known as Puntaong Palit in Lepcha. In many occasions, Ren P.T.Simick leads the band of the flute party in welcoming distinguished guests. Wherever he goes and whatever he does, he performs it in perfection. He is a Buddhist by religion but performs all the Lepcha traditional culture and custom in full spirit and honour. He himself feels proud to be a Lepcha and always tries to uphold the Lepcha flag high.

Since 90's of the last century, the Lepcha society has started reviving the dwindle culture, custom, religion and language. The Lepcha society including its social, political, economic and linguistic aspects has deteriorated with the advent of the British in this part of the country. Lepchas have been tagged with the stigma of 'dying race', 'decaying society', 'vanishing society', 'under-developed society' etc. The main areas of deterioration center around their culture, language and religion. With the religious conversion, which started with the arrival of British, the Lepchas started neglecting their traditional culture, custom and belief. The Boongthig and Mun, the Lepcha priest and priestess are being replaced firstly by Gumba Lama and then by Church Father or Pastor. Most such religious priests are from other community and do not know the typical Lepcha culture, custom and tradition. The revival or the take off stage has been started with the initiation taken by the leaders of the ILTA since 90's of the last century. A group of Lepcha personalities with sound knowledge about Lepcha language, culture, custom, tradition and belief has taken key role in all the activities of the Association. With combined effort and able leadership, the Association has succeeded in motivating the

common people and has started regaining their days old status in socio-economic and cultural arena. One of such active leaders who took key role in reviving the Lepcha society is none other than Ren P.T.Simick. He is the Lepcha in the true sense of the term with sound knowledge about Lepcha language, culture, custom, folklore, folksong, religion, tradition, rituals and what not. His contribution in the revival phase of the Lepcha culture will always be remembered and we hope that more Lepchas will follow his path in uplifting the community in respect of Lepcha language, culture, custom, tradition, religion and belief. May the almighty give him long and sound life so that he could contribute more for the cause of the Lepchas.

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AATHING SANDO TSHERING TAMSANG
(1880 – 1940)

Aathing Sando Tshering Tamsang
The Founder President of Lepcha Association

Lepchas, the aboriginal inhabitants of Darjeeling Himalayan region have their rich language, alphabet and literature. Lepcha language has been used in Darjeeling Grant of 1835, Proclamation of Darjeeling in 1839 and remained as official language of Darjeeling administration from 1835 to 1911. The first school at Lebong in Darjeeling was opened by the Christian missionaries for the Lepchas in Lepcha medium in 1841. Rev. W. start and K. G. Niebel were the first independent clergymen who translated parts of Bible like Gospel of Mathews, Mark and John from English to Lepcha during 1840's. Thikoong G.B. Mainwaring composed the first Lepcha Grammar in 1876 and Lepcha Dictionary in 1898. Two other Darjeeling tea planters John and William Stolke compiled an extensive Lepcha-English Dictionary in 1890s. The Europeans remained the good friends of the Lepchas and worked for the development of Lepcha language and literature in the initial phase of Darjeeling acquisition. But the Lepcha language had to face a depressed stage when the community became marginalized in their own homeland. Their language was set aside by the British administration and the community became bilingual and multilingual. The lingua franca of the region has changed from Lepcha to Nepali. The son of the land started becoming landless and the prime lands of the hill have shifted from Lepchas to the non-Lepchas. Thikoong G.B. Mainwaring describes the pathetic condition of the Lepcha language as: "The language which had, hitherto, been the language of the whole country of Sikim, which all Tibetans, Butias or others who entered the country acquired and spoke, in which under the rule of Colonel Lloyd, business was

carried on, and justice in English courts administered, in the character of which decrees and documents were written and recorded – this language was completely set aside, and Hindustani was made the chief language in Dorjeeling" (Mainwaring, 1876). Although "the advent of the European was the first real blow the Lepchas received; their downfall quickly followed" (Mainwaring, 1876) and the last nail was hammered in the coffin in 1911 by totally keeping aside the Lepcha language from official use. By this time the Lepchas were outnumbered in their own homeland and constitute as low as 3.65 percent (1911 census) of total population of Darjeeling. Along with the language, the Lepchas also lost their land and "the free sons of the forest, the hearts yeoman of the land, the lords of the soil, became the servants of servant, the very slaves of slaves" (Mainwaring, 1876).

The pathetic conditions of the Lepchas were felt, realized by all the Lepchas and they were the direct victims of the situation but there is no evidence of any protest or movement of the Lepchas during the period. It may be due to the fact that there was no leader among the Lepchas who could mobilize the community against the oppression. Although Lepchas are blessed with good number of leaders at the community level in the historical period like The-Kung Tek, Chagzot Bolek or Satrajeet, Tasso Bidur, Tur vey Pano, Tur-Sang Pano, Tur- Ageng Pano, Tur-Ayek Pano, Mipon Rub, Gaeboo Aachyuk and others. These leaders either ruled the community with great care or fight to save the interest of the community as and when required against foreign oppressions. But there was a gap or a sort of vacuum in the leadership among the Lepchas during eighteenth century and the first half of nineteenth century. This crisis of leadership aggravated the situation and made a catastrophe and they had to suffer the situation for a long

period and by the time they got a leader it was too late and the state of affairs went out of control.

Aathing Sando Tshering Tamsang was a gifted personality to the Lepchas who could take the courage of forming an Association for the Lepchas as early as in 1925 and assembled the oppressed community under one umbrella during the British rule. He was the Mandal (village chief) under the British rule and used to collect rent for the ruler on commission basis. How much he could do for his community does not matter much but the very fact of realizing the need of formation of an Association and uniting the Lepchas for the cause of the community was the great thing which Aathing Sando Tshering Tamsang did for the community. He did not bother about his personal interest with the British administration and dedicated his life for the cause of his community. In the process he had to go against the policy of the British who appointed him as Mandal of Bom area from where he used to earn handsome amount of income. He was the first Lepcha Mandal of Bom and acquired the post for his personality and efficiency. After him both his sons first his eldest son Aathing K.P.Tamsang and then Ren D.T.Tamsang inherited Mandalship of Bom.

Aathing Sando Tshering Tamsang was born at Bom, Kalimpong. He got primary education and could not continue for higher education and concentrated in agricultural activities. He was Buddhist by religion and used to practice the Lepcha traditional culture by heart. He inherited huge landed property at Bom, Kafyer and at Bhalukhop, Kalimpong. He later sold his land at Bhalukhop. His father Pinkey Lepcha had huge landed property in those days. They belong to Tamsangmoo and in those days Tamsangmoo were in majority in Kalimpong. This family is one of the aboriginal Lepcha families of Kalimpong. The forefathers of Aathing Sando Tshering Tamsang were Pinkey Lepcha, Jyaomley

Lepcha, Sana leboo, Tshering Nobo Lepcha, Aduk Lepcha, Adung Lepcha, Adik Lepcha, Tahrim Lepcha, Shyookpat Lepcha, Kaling Lepcha – all lived in Baong Busty, Kalimpong. Some descendants of Tamsang family are living in other place but most of them are still found in Baong Busty and all inherited landed property from their ancestors.

One of the basic purpose for which the Lepcha Association was formed by Aathing Sando Tshering Tamsang was reintroduction of Lepcha language and literature in the school curriculum and official use. He has seen how the Lepcha language was kept aside both from the Administrative use and from the schools. He could not resist from protesting against the apathetic behavior of the British during the period. He realized that it is not possible to fight against the British administration individually so he formed the Association for the community and gathered strength. Lepcha Association was the first Association for any community in the hills of Darjeeling. He formed the Association at Kalimpong and till to this day the Headquarters of Lepcha Association for all the Lepchas of Darjeeling district remains at Kalimpong. The Lepchas are still fighting for introduction of Lepcha language in the schools for which the Association was first formed by Aathing Sando Tshering Tamsang.

The community affinity which Aathing Sando Tshering Tamsang started by establishing the Lepcha Association in 1925 has been carried out by his posterity even today. His elder son Aathing K.P.Tamsang held the post of both General Secretary and the President of the Association and remained the main architect behind the revival of Lepcha language and literature. Among his works, the Lepcha English Encyclopeadic Dictionary is the most popular and has enriched Lepcha language to a great extent. His younger son, Ren D.T.Tamsang also held the post of President of the

Association and contributed in uplifting the community. During 70s when Ren D.T.Tamsang was the President of Lepcha Association, Lepcha Boys Hostel was constructed and he managed to transfer a portion of the land from Lepcha Gumba to Lepcha Boys Hostel. The Lepcha Association has its office at the first floor of the Hostel building. The Lepcha Museum which has been collected by Lapon Sonam Tshering Lepcha, Padma Shri Awardee has been located at the first floor of the building. Ren Lyangsong Tamsang, grandson of Aathing Sando Tshering Tamsang joined the workings of the Association after his retirement as Major from the British Army. He held the posts of General Secretary and President of the Association and at present he is the Chairman of newly formed Mayel Lyang Lepcha Development Board. He contributed enormously in reviving Lepcha language, literature and culture. Ren Dup Shuzong Lepcha eldest son of Ren D.T.Tamsang is one of the well known Lepcha literati and is entrusted with all the responsibility of Lepcha section of 'Aachuley' and 'King Gaeboo Aachyuk News Magazine', the two news magazines of the Lepchas. Lapon Sonam Tshering Lepcha, nephew (grandson of his elder brother Ren Athi Tshering Lepcha) of Aathing Sando Tshering Tamsang is the First Padma Shri Awardee of the Lepchas. He received the Padma Shri in 2006 for his contribution in Lepcha art and culture. Renue Hildamit Lepcha, wife of Lapon Sonam Tshering Lepcha also received Padma Shri in 2013. This is the only Lepcha couple to receive the fourth highest civilian national award of India. The soul of Aathing Sando Tshering Tamsang may be pleased to see that his posterities are continuing their service for the cause of the Lepchas.

It is said that the present Lepcha Gumba of Baong village where the Lepcha Boys Hostel, ILTA office and Museum are

situated, was originally located at Durpin area of Kalimpong. During British period the Durpin area was acquired by the army and the Lepchas who were residing there along with the Gumba were shifted to Kafer. The Lepchas of Kalimpong who used to worship at Durpin Gumba started facing problems due the shift of the Gumba to Kafer. Realizing the problem Aathing Sando Thering Tamsang donated a plot of land for the constructed of the Gumpa at its present location. Later when his youngest son Ren Dorjee Temba Tamsang became the President of both the Lepcha Association and Gumba, a plot of land out of Gumba land was donated for the construction of Lepcha Boys Hostel which accommodates Lepcha Association and Lepcha Museum in the same building.

In his fond memory, the Indigenous Lepcha Tribal Association is organizing and dedicated the annual Archery Competition in the name of 'Aathing Sando Tshering Tamsang Traditional Lepcha Archery Contest'. Archery is the traditional ethnic game of the Lepchas and the competition has rightly been dedicated in the name of Aathing Sando Tshering Tamsang who realized and fought for the preservation and protection of traditional culture, custom and language of the community. The competition carries trophy and cash prize in the group level and in Sharp shooter categories.

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DR ONGDEN LEPCHA
(1882 – 1934)

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Dr Ongden Lepcha
The First Lepcha Doctor

The only Lepcha personality in whose name a road in Kalimpong has been named is Dr Ongden Lepcha. Dr. Ongden Lepcha Road starts from Trikone Park in Thanadara and after passing through Kalimpong main motor stand the road ends at C.K.Chowk and then takes its name as R.C.Mintri Road. It is not a very lengthy road but passes through the heart of the town and connects two main roads of Kalimpong, the main road and 12A State Highway on the west with R.C. Mintri Road and Reli Road in the east. In memory to his service to the people of Kalimpong and as a tribute to his dedicated soul, the Kalimpong Municipality has named the road after Dr Ongden Lepcha.

The Christian Missionaries encouraged and took prominent role in spreading education among the children of Darjeeling hills. Due to non-availability of higher education facilities in Darjeeling hills, the British used to collect meritorious students and sent them outside both within the country or abroad for the completion different categories of degrees in higher education. Thikoong General G. B. Mainwaring sent Thamboo Lepcha to England and after his graduation appointed him as Headmaster of the Lepcha School at Darjeeling. Similarly many Lepcha and non-Lepcha boys were sent to different places to acquire higher education in different disciplines. Among them the most successful Lepcha personality was Ongden Lepcha who was sent to 'Temple Medical School' at Patna, Bihar. Both Ongden Lepcha and Yen Sing Sitling, completed the course in medicine from Bankipur, Patna in 1905. After completing the medical course both of them returned to the hills and Dr. Ongden joined Darjeeling Hospital while Dr. Sitling served at Pedong. Then Dr. Sitling joined Darjeeling Hospital and Dr Ongden Lepcha came back to Kalimpong and joined Charteries Hospital which later on takes the present name Sub Divisional

Hospital, Kalimpong. Dr Yen Sing Sitling, a Christian, served the Lepchas by holding the post of President of the Association in the 1930s and he was also the Vice-President of Hill People's Social Union spearheading the Ne-Bu-La movement for the recognition of Lepcha, Nepali and Tibetan languages in 1934.

Dr Ongden was the first native doctor at Kalimpong Hospital. Dr Ongden was a brilliant student at the Medical School, Patna and was awarded "Principal's Medal' for his outstanding performance in the examination. The Medal was presented by Colonel R.H.Whitwell, IMS on 10 April 1905.

During the First World War, Dr Ongden joined the British Army as a Medical Officer and served the war victims with full care and dedication. Due to his sincere and hard working service, Dr Ongden was rewarded with many medals and prizes by the British Government. After the end of First World War, Dr Ongden came back to Kalimpong and joined Charteries Hospital and dedicated his entire life for the service of his Kalimpong people. During his service in the British Army, Dr Ongden acquired vast experience in medical science and enriched his skill as a medical doctor which he used for the sevice of the people of Kalimpong.

Dr Ongden was a doctor with extra ordinary skill and expertise. Only his personal presence and caring in many cases helped in increasing the mental strength of the patients and cured them. During the Cholera epidemic in the hills, Dr Ongden served the affected people of Kalimpong with much care and dedication. Inspite of shortage of medicine and staff, his dedication and nursing saved many lives of the hill. This showed his sincerity to the profession and humanitarian character. He was very kind, caring, concerned and charitable personality. He not only served the people with medical treatment but also helped them personally with money, food and medicine. Many poor patients received direct financial help from him. He considered all patients equally without any difference in terms of caste, creed, religion or language. Dr Ongden is a pride to the Lepcha society.

As a mark of respect and in loving memory of Dr Ongden, the Kalimpong Municipality has named one of the prominent roads at the heart of the town in the name of Dr. Ongden Lepcha Road. The people of Kalimpong showed their admiration, respect, appreciation and high regard to the noble soul of Dr. Ongden by erecting his bust at the motor stand, a prime place of Kalimpong way back in 1934. Dr. Ongden considered all communities equally and he was the doctor for all the communities of Kalimpong and in return all irrespective of their differences in caste and creed had join hand in erecting the bust of their loving doctor. The bust was made at Kalimpong by Mr Acklain, a British sculptor who at that time was the owner and was also resided at 'Morning Sun', the present day Kumudini Homes School. After the Motor Stand, the statue for some time was lying at the Catherine Graham's Park at Damber Chowk and finally it is placed at right hand corner of the main entrance of the present Town Hall on 15 October 2004. The then member of the Legislative Assembly, Govt. of West Bengal, Mr. Gaulan Lepcha and the Indigenous Lepcha Tribal Association took active role in re-establishment of the bust of Dr Ongden Lepcha at Town Hall. Incidentally it is so happen that the newly established Mayel Lyang Lepcha Development Board is also working at Town Hall and they can take proper care and maintenance of the statue of one of the great Lepcha souls of Kalimpong. Dr Ongden Lepcha (1882 – 1934) was the first doctor among the Lepchas and during his short life of 52 years he served the people of Kalimpong for nearly thirty years with his vast medical knowledge and dedication.

The descendents of Dr Ongden Lepcha are still residing in the Mission Compound, Kalimpong town and they belong to the Rongong moo of the Lepchas.

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RENUE AAZEM REBECCA NAMCHU
(1884 – 1958)

Renue Aazem Rebecca Namchu
The First Lepcha Woman President of the Association

Renue Aazem Rebecca Namchu is popularly known as David Babuni in Kalimpong. Originally she was from Sittong Busty under Kurseong Sub-Division of Darjeeling district. Her grandfather was the head Lama of Sittong Gumba. Babuni died at Kalimpong on 28 July 1958 at the age of 74. At the age of 14 Aazem got married with Mr. David Chandra Mohan, a 60 years old widower and a tea plantation manager of Kurseong. He was a Christian and originally hailed from Gaya, Bihar. His known circle called him 'David Babu' and thereby his wife was popularized as 'David Babuni' (Babuni is the feminine gender of Babu in Nepali). Even today she can only be recognized as David Babuni and very few can identify her by her birth name - Renue Aazem Rebecca Namchu

David Chandra Mohan was very close to Rev. William Macfarlane (1840 – 1887), one of the Scottish Missionaries and they worked together among the orphan children at Gaya, Bihar. Later on in June 1870, Rev. Macfarlane came to Darjeeling to start his new mission field. He extended his mission work to Mangwa, Sittong, Sunathong, Pembling, Nimbong, Pedong, Bom, Chibbo, Loley, Pakong, Munzong, and other places in the hilly region of Darjeeling. While visiting along with Rev. Macfarlane, David Mohan might have met Renue Aazem Rebecca Namchu at Sittong and ultimately they got married. David later left his job as plantation manager and joined as an assistant teacher in Scottish Universities Mission Institute (SUMI) in Kalimpong which was established in 1887. He was a close associate of Rev. Macfarlane and devoted his time and energy for the spread of Gospel among the people of Kalimpong. David Mohan was one of the pioneers who took active role in the construction of Macfarlane Church in Kalimpong. He was not only a rich man but was a devoted

personality for the cause of Christianity. He voluntarily shared some of the burdens of the Church and used to pay monthly salary of the bell man of the Church. After his death, David Babuni continued to bear some such expenses until her death although her sources of income had reduced drastically. Her sources of income limited to the collection of rent from landed properties and some earnings from agricultural fields. After eight years of conjugal life, Babuni lost her husband probably in the year 1960. They were issueless and Babuni was a dowager and inherited 'Kanchenjunga Koti' and all other landed properties of David Mohan. Presently the Koti is looked after and inherited by Mr. Kaiser Namchu, son of Dathap Namchu, only brother of Renue Aazem Rebecca Namchu.

After the death of David Mohan, the Missionaries appointed and deputed one Yanzung Lepcha, a lady from Mangwa Busty, Peshok to look after Babuni. Yanzung became the helper, guide and all time follower of Babuni till her death. Yanzung brought other members of her family from Mangwa and stayed with Babuni and was later given a plot of land at 9th Mile, Kalimpong for residential purposes. This plot of land was later sold to late B.B.Pradhan by her descendents where the present Rockvale Academy School is located.

Renue Aazem Rebecca Namchu was a tall lady and had a huge physical figure with more than one quintal of weight. Her complexion was not as fair as the common Lepchas and was a bit blackish. It is said that due to her weight the vehicle flattened on the other side of Rupi Baze, the driver of the old car which Babuni normally used. The space of the vehicle was so narrow for her that it could not accommodate her legs properly and for that purpose Mangal Lepcha (renamed as Hawalder by Babuni) was employed who always accompanied Babuni and engaged in placing her legs properly in the vehicle. Being a daughter of Head Lama, originally Babuni was Buddhist but after her marriage she was converted into Christianity.

Renue Aazem Rebecca Namchu had no formal school education but she was fluent in four languages – Lepcha, Nepali, Bengali and Hindi. She could not speak English properly but could understand and language never became barrier for her association with the Europeans. Her close circle of associations was with the European families of Rev. J.A.Graham, Mr. Macdonald, Dr. Orling of Kalimpong. She was very close to the elite Bengali families residing at Kalimpong like Justice S.R.Das; Mr Dasgupta; P.C.Biswas; S.D.O., Dr. Nag, and others. She used to meet Rabindranath Tagore when he visited Kalimpong and stayed at Gauripur House during 1938 and 1940. Babuni used to communicate in Hindi with the Europeans, in Bengali with the Bengalees, in Nepali with the local Nepali people and in Lepcha with her fellow community. She was well versed in Lepcha language and preferred to communicate in her mother tongue with the Lepchas.

All top officials and dignitaries who were posted and visited Kalimpong during both British and independent India had close contact with Babuni. Her hobby was to invite them in parties. She was a good cook and was expert in both continental and local dishes. It is told that Babuni collected fund for Second World War by running food stall and selling Nepali dishes during the Mela organized in the month of December each year in Kalimpong. In 1954, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India accompanied by her daughter Ms Indira Gandhi and Krishna Menon, the then Defence Minister of India visited Kalimpong and stayed at Sri Sadan, the present SDO Bunglow. Babuni was the head cook assisted by her Hawalder, Yanzung and other family members including her niece Sun Kumari who later married with Mr. P.R.Pradhan, ex-headmaster of SUMI School. Later on when Nehru visited Darjeeling, Babuni led a cultural team and met the Prime Minister personally. Lapon Sonam Tshering Lepcha and Ren Nora Namchu both from Bom Busty were the members of the cultural team and carry their memories of Babuni with Pandit Nehru. When

Babuni became the President of Lepcha Association, she used to call meetings at her residence and used to entertain all the members with lunch or dinner. During her commissionership of Kalimpong Municipality, she used to carry food articles for all the other members of the municipality on all meeting days.

There is no record of joining Babuni in the freedom struggle of India but she kept close touch with the top leaders of the country both during the British rule and independent India. It is learnt that she had very good link with Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru and even with Mahatma Gandhi. Whenever any top officials and ministers visited Kalimpong both during pre and post independence periods, Babuni used to meet with them. She believed that good rapport with the top officials is the only means of bringing something for the local people particularly for the Lepchas for whom she was fighting through the Lepcha Association. She was reliable, trustworthy, and confidante to both the British and the Indian Governments. This shows another very important character of Babuni's life.

Renue Aazem Rebecca Namchu is perhaps the first Lepcha lady who dedicated her life for the cause of the society in general and for the Lepchas in particular. When Kalimpong Municipality was formed in 1945, Babuni was nominated as its first Commissioner along with the other reputed personalities like Dr. B.L.Dixit, Mr. M.K.Pradhan, Mr. G.S.Prasad, Mr.D.M.Moktan and others of Kalimpong town. Later on she was elected twice as the Commissioner of the Municipality and has the record of being the first lady to act as the Commissioner for three consecutive terms. But for the fourth term she changed her constituency and fought from ward number nine, that is, Mission Compound area where from she lost the election to Gorkha League candidate Mr. P.R.Pradhan, husband of her niece, Sun Kumari. Anyway, she showed her efficiency as a commissioner and undertook a number of developmental works in the municipal area in general and in her

constituency in particular. She was an impartial and dedicated soul for the cause of the people of Kalimpong.

Renue Aazem Rebecca Namchu devoted her life for the cause of the development of the Lepchas of Darjeeling district. Before independence, in 1934's a joint organization of the three hill communities of the district was formed by the name NEBULA under the leadership of Mr Laden La, ex deputy District Superintendent of Police. In NEBULA, NE represents Nepalese, BU represents Bhutias, and LA stands for the Lepchas. After independence the organization separated in three different organizations – Gorgka League for the Nepalese, Tibetan Association for the Tibetans and the Lepchas merged with Lepcha Association which was already formed in 1925. Renue Aazem Rebecca Namchu was closely associated and connected with the Lepcha Association and led the team to meet Pandit Nehru at Darjeeling and pleaded for the recognition of the Lepcha Association. The delegate included Lepcha personalities like Ren L.P.T.Rongong, Ren K.P.Tamsang, Senior B.C.Simik and others but Babuni was the only lady member of the delegate. In other occasions the Association members met Prafulla Sen and Dr B.C.Roy, the then Chief Minister of West Bengal both at Calcutta and at Kalimpong. Along with other demands, the Lepchas were pressuring hard for the inclusion of the Lepchas under the category of Scheduled Tribe of India. Renue Aazem Rebecca Namchu needs to be credited for the inclusion of the Lepchas in the category of ST since 1951 and the facilities which the Lepchas continue to receive till date. Babuni was a motherly figure and was easily accessible to all at any time and extended all sorts of help including financial help even during the periods when she was suffering from financial stringency. Besides her active participation, Babuni helped the Lepcha Association financially and it is learnt that she also donated some plots of landed property to the Association by forming a

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because of her huge body the King found it difficult to lift her up without sanctioning an extra two thousand. The delegate returned to Kalimpong with joy and thanked Renue Aazem Rebecca Namchu for the simple act of increasing the amount of help from the King for the Lepcha Association.

Renue Aazem Rebecca Nanchu was a born fighter and fought for what she considered to be right. She had no formal school education but she was very talented lady. It is told that she used to argue with the lawyer, Madan Babu who had to surrender and ultimately bow down and accepted the strong arguments which Babuni used to make. She had good knowledge on engineering also and advised many persons of Kalimpong in constructing their houses, buildings etc. Manjula Cottage, Usha Cottage, residence of L.D.Kazi, ex Chief Minister of Sikkim and some others still carry her knowledge of engineering and construction. She possessed sporting spirit also. She was an active member of Organizing Committee of Kalimpong Mela which used to arrange yearly mela in the month of December. Babuni with her partner Raja Topgay used to participate in the 'Three Legged' race and won medals several times.

Although it was very unusual during her period but Babuni was a business minded lady having good sense of entrepreneurial ability. It is learnt that she tried to start two factories: soap factory and soda water factory in her residential complex. There were no such factories in Kalimpong during those period but had bright prospects in terms of profit. Her all hopes in establishing factories went in vain due to British restrictions in using the development area, where she was residing, for any business or industrial purpose. But later she used her entrepreneurial skill for the cause of the Lepchas. She initiated three sources of earnings for the Lepcha Association and for her community. The three sources were: Grain Gola, Diary Farming and Transport business. Grain

Gola was a sort of cooperative storage where the Lepchas after harvest could store their grains/crops which they later could use to give loan to others or sell at higher prices. Babuni provided godown for the purpose and where one storekeeper was engaged to maintain all records. The grain gola scheme proved to be beneficial for the Lepchas and worked for some time.

Azem Rebika Namchu was suffering from breast cancer and had diabetic for quite some time and was under the treatment of her family physician Dr. Boral of Kalimpong. She expired on 28 July 1958 at the age of 74. Her huge body was carried from her residence at Kanchenjunga Koti to the graveyard at Mission Compound on a truck which was followed by a long procession of all communities of Kalimpong. She was laid to rest along with her husband, David Chandra Mohan Babu in the graveyard at Mission Compound, Kalimpong. All irrespective of their caste, creed and religion saluted their beloved leader in sorrow and grief and prayed for the peaceful rest of the soul along with her husband in the heaven. Renue Aazem Rebecca Nanchu was issueless but she was the mother of all the Lepchas. The mother still remains in the mind of the people of Kalimpong in general and to the Lepchas in particular. In memory of the great soul of Renue Aazem Rebecca Namchu, The Indigenous Lepcha Tribal Association has started an annual 'Renyoo Aazem Rebecca Nanchyoomoo Lepcha Songs and Dance Competition' where hundreds of young Lepcha boys and girls take part and compete for the title. This is a step towards preservation, conservation and expansion of Lepcha culture for which Renue Aazem Rebecca Nanchu had fought her whole life. A huge photo of huge figured Renue Aazem Rebecca Nanchu with the caption 'we remember you' can be seen at the reception centre of the Mayel Lyang Lepcha Development Board and at the office of the Indigenous Lepcha Development Association which indicates that the Lepchas are concerned about their first lady President of the Association.

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RENUE HILDAMIT LEPCHA
(1956 –)

Renue Hildamit Lepcha
The First Padma Shri Awardee Lepcha Woman

Renue Hildamit Lepcha is the first Lepcha woman and the third Lepcha personality to receive India's fourth highest prestigious civilian Award 'Padma Shri'. She received the glorious Padma Shri Award from His Excellency Shri Pranab Mukharjee, the President of India on 20 April, 2013 at Rastrapati Bhawan, New Delhi. It is the second Padma Shri for the Lepchas in Arts after Lapon Sonam Tshering Lepcha, her husband who was the first Lepcha to receive the Padma Shri in Arts in 2007. Padma Shri is the fourth highest prestigious national civil award which is awarded by the President of India in recognition of excellent and exemplary work by the Indian citizens in different fields. Renue Hildamit Lepcha is an "eminent figure in the field of Lepcha music and received the prestigious award for her contribution in reviving, promoting and preserving the old folklore, songs and music of the vanishing tribe, the Lepchas" (Government of India, Padma Shri 2013:37). It is perhaps a record in the history of Padma award that any couple, both husband and wife, receives the Padma award and Renue Hildamit Lepcha made such a record by receiving the Padma Shri award in 2013 whereas her husband had received it in 2007.

Padma Awards

'Padma' Awards are the highest civilian awards of India and are conferred in three different categories namely 'Padma Vibhuan', 'Padma Bhusan' and 'Padma Shri'. These awards are given mainly to citizens of India to recognize their distinguished contribution in various spheres of activities including Arts, Literature and Education, Sports, Medicine, Social service, Public affairs, Science and Engineering, Trade and Industry, Civil Service and many more.

Padma Vibhusan is conferred on the people for the exceptional and distinguished services done by them; Padma Bhusan for distinguished services of high order and Padma Shri is given to a person for his/her distinguished service in any field. These awards are announced on the eve of Independence Day celebration each year and are conferred by the President of India at a function organized by Rastrapati Bhawan sometimes around March/April every year.

Padma Shri is the fourth highest award in the hierarchy of civilian awards after Bharat Ratna, Padma Vibhusan and Padma Bhusan. On it's observe the words "Padma" and "Shri" in Devnagari appear above and below the lotus flower (the word Padma in Sanskrit means lotus). The geometrical pattern on either side is in burnished bronze. All embossing is in white gold. As on 2013, total 2577 people have received the Padma Shri award. The award was first started in independent India in 1954 by conferring to 17 candidates of distinguished personalities. In 2013, the President of India has consented 108 Padma awards to eminent personalities. The Padma awards of 2013 include 4 Padma Vibhusan, 24 Padma Bhusan and 80 Padma Shri awards. Women received 24 awards.

Among the 80 Padma Shri awards of 2013, Lepchas are proud with serial number 15 in the list which writes "Hilda Mit Lepcha, Arts, Sikkim". This year out of 80 awards, females received 13 Padma Shri awards and Renue Hildamit Lepcha is one of them. She was awarded in the category of Arts in which 24 personalities received the award. Beside Arts, six in Social work, eleven in Science and Engineering, Five in Trade and Industry, thirteen in Medicine, thirteen in Literature and Education, six in Sports, one in Fashion Designing and one in Archaeology have received the Padma Shri award. The Padma awards have been chosen from all over the country and for Sikkim the only award is given to Renue Hildamit Lepcha. This year the highest number of awards (total 18

awards) goes to the state of Maharatra followed by Delhi (14 awards), Sikkim receives only one such award.

After its merger with Indian Union in 1975, altogether seven Padma Shri awards have been received by the small Himalayan state of Sikkim. The first Padma Shri goes to Phu Dorjee in the category of Sports in 1984. This is followed by — Shri Gadul Sing Lama (Sanu Lama) in Literature and Education in the year 2005; Shri Somam Tshering Lepcha in Arts in the year 2007; Shri Bhaichung Bhutia in the category of Sports in the year 2008; Shri Norden Tshering Bhutia in the category of Literature and Education in the year 2009; Ms Keepu Tsering Lepcha in Social Work in the year 2009 and lastly by Smt Hildamit Lepcha in the category of Arts in the year 2013. Out of seven Padma Shri in Sikkim, the Lepchas must be proud of getting three awards. This shows the level of contribution of the Lepchas in different fields like arts, education, social work etc. in the state of Sikkim.

Hildamit Lepcha:

Born on March 14, 1956 in Ryon Busty, Gitdabling under Pembling Block of Kalimpong sub-division of Darjeeling district, West Bengal, Renue Hildamit Lepcha learned the folk music from her Guru cum husband Lapon Sonam Tshering Lepcha who also received Padma Shri on 5 April, 2007 from His Excellency Dr. A. P. J. Abdul Kalam, the then President of India in the category of Arts for his excellent expertise in the Lepcha folksong. Renue Hildamit Lepcha was born and brought up at Ryon with her father Ren Sangay Tshering Lepcha and mother Renue Mangalmit Lepcha. They are the farming family and are Christian by religion.

Renue Hildamit Lepcha studied up to the primary school at Ryon Busty but became expert in traditional Lepcha musical instruments and Lepcha folk songs. She was appointed as Musician cum singer of Lepcha folk music and songs in the Song and Drama Units, Cultural Affairs and Heritage Department, Government of Sikkim, Gangtok in 1980.

Awards, Gift and Citations:

Renue Hildamit Lepcha beside the prestigious Padma Shri award also received a number of state and national level awards, certificates and citations. They are:

• **Sangeet Natak Academi Award, 2008**: Renue Hildamit Lepcha received the prestigious Sangeet Natak Academi Award, 2008 from her Excellency Smt Prativa Devi Singh Patil at a function held at Vigyan Bhawan, New Delhi on 14th July, 2009. The award comprises of a shawl, a citation and a cash prize of Rs 50,000/-. She has been selected for the Academi Award for her 'dedicated work in pioneering and promoting Lepcha culture' and her 'contribution to the Lepcha music of Sikkim'. Renue Hildamit Lepcha was one of the 33 persons who were awarded the Sangeet Natak Academi Award in 2008 and become the second Lepcha person to receive such award after her husband Lapon Sonam Tshering Lepcha who received the award in 1996.

• **Apna Utsav, 1986**: The Utsav was celebrated during 8 to 26 November 1986 at New Delhi and was organised by the National Cultural Festival, Department of Culture, Government of India. Renue Hildamit Lepcha participated the Utsav and represented the state of Sikkim.

• **Sikkim Autumn Festival, 1988**: The Sikkim Autumn Festival was organised by the Eastern Zonal Cultural Centre and the Government of Sikkim at Gangtok during 1 to 7 November and Renue Hildamit Lepcha participated the Festival.

• **Republic Day Celebrations:** Renue Hildamit Lepcha participated Republic Day Celebrations at New Delhi in 1980, 1982, 1986, 2001, 2008 and represented the Government of Sikkim.

• **Inter Zonal Cultural Festival, 1990**: The Inter Zonal Cultural Festival was held at Agartala, Tripura during 20 to 23 October 1990 and was sponsored by the Department of Cultural Affairs and Tourism, Government of Tripura. Renue Hildamit Lepcha represented the government of Sikkim and received a citation with heartiest felicitation.

• **Zonal Tribal festival, 1990**: Renue Hildamit Lepcha took part at the Zonal Tribal Festival held at Polo Ground Imphal from 8th to 10th December, 1990 organized by the Department of Arts and Culture, Manipur in collaboration with the Eastern Zonal Cultural Centre, Kolkata.

• **International Flower Festival, 1990**: Renue Hildamit Lepcha participated in the cultural evening on the occasion of International Flower festival, 1990 organized by the Eastern Zonal Cultural Centre and Government of Sikkim at Gangtok from 9th to 18th April, 1990.

• **Tourist Festival, 1991**: Renue Hildamit Lepcha participated in the Tourist Festival, 1991 and Bamboo and Cane Exhibition organized by the Eastern Zonal Cultural Centre and Department of Art and Culture, Government of Sikkim during 22nd and 24th November, 1991.

• **Island Tourism Festival, 1995**: For her performance in folk dance of Sikkim, Renue Hildamit Lepcha was awarded a certificate of Honour by the Island Tourism Festival, 1995. The festival was organised by the Department of Education, Youth and Sports, Andaman and Nicober Islands at Port Blair during 16th to 25th February, 1995.

• **Sikkim Traditional Cultural Festival, 1997**: Renue Hildamit Lepcha participated Sikkim Traditional Cultural festival, 1997 jointly organized by the Department of Culture, Government of Sikkim and Maghe Sankranti Mela Committee, Jorethang during 13th to 17th January 1997 at Jorethang, South Sikkim.

• **World Music Day, 1998**: The World Music Day was celebrated at Gangtok, Sikkim on 21st June 1998 and was organized jointly by the Department of Art and Culture, Government of Sikkim and Eastern Zonal Cultural Centre, Calcutta. Renue Hildamit Lepcha participated the function with her cultural team.

• **Open Writer's Conference, 1999**: Renue Hildamit Lepcha attended the Open Writer's Conference, 1999 held at Gangtok

during 14th and 15th July 1999. The Conference was organized jointly by Department of Arts ad Culture, Government of Sikkim and Eastern Zonal Cultural Centre, Calcutta.

• **Folk Dance Festival, 2001:** Renue Hildamit Lepcha participated Folk Dance Festival, 2001 organized on the occasion of Republic Day 2001 at New Delhi. The Festival was organized by Ministry of Tourism and Culture, Department of Culture, Government of India.

• **Evening of Tribal Dance, 2001:** German Consulate General and Eastern Zonal Cultural Centre jointly organized an Evening of Tribal Dance on 11th December, 2011 at German Consulate, Kolkata. Renue Hildamit Lepcha participated at the most enjoyable performance with Lepcha Tribal dance and song.

• **Brhaddesi Sangeet Mahotsav, 2002**: Renue Hildamit Lepcha participated at the Brhaddesi Sangeet Mahotsav organised by Sangeet Natak Academi at Guwahati during 13th to 20th February 2002.

• **World Music Day, 2006**: Renue Hildamit Lepcha took part at the World Music Day, 2006 jointly organized by Eastern Zonal Cultural Centre, Calcutta and Cultural Affairs and Heritage Department, Government of Sikkim on 21st July, 2006 at Gangtok.

• **Namchi Mahotsav, 2006**: Renue Hildamit Lepcha actively participated in the Namchi Mahotsav, 2006 jointly organized by North-East Zone Cultural centre, Dimapur and Cultural Affairs and Heritage Department, Government of Sikkim on 19th and 20th October at Namchi, South Sikkim.

• **Rastriya Rangshala Camp, 2008**: Renue Hildamit Lepcha participated as Tableau artist in the Heritage Conservation tableau presented by Sikkim in the Republic Day Parade, 2008 at New Delhi. The program was organized by the Ministry of Defence, Government of India.

Publications:

Renue Hildamit Lepcha got her formal education only upto the primary level and naturally all her publications are in her mother tongue, Lepcha. But her publications reveal her mind set, high thought provoking capability and her knowledge, awareness and love for the Lepcha tradition, culture and custom. The following books are at her credit:

• Lepcha, Hildamit (2006). *Tayoo-Kup-Sa Chu-me-lyu* (Life on Lepcha Women).

• Lepcha, Hildamit (2008). *Chuk-Dong Paonaol* (A Gift of Poems).

• Lepcha, Hildamit (2008). *Aa-Zik* (Female Education).

Cassettes:

The basic areas of activity of Renue Hildamit Lepcha are in Lepcha song, drama and dance. She was trained by her Guru in Lepcha folk song and folk musical instruments. Naturally Renue Hildamit Lepcha got her expertise in Lepcha folk song and folk music. The following cassettes are at her credit and entertain the Lepchas in both Sikkim and Darjeeling:

• Kingchoom Chyu Bong Sa (1987): Folk song on Himalaya.

• Rong Vom (1988): Lepcha Folk songs. Vol. I,II,III

• Lepcha Folk Songs on Daraomden (1993): Vol.IV.

• Lenchyo Vom (2003): Lepcha Romantic Songs.

• Rong Zyung Vom (2003): Lepcha Folk Songs.

Renue Hildamit Lepcha was blessed by Naraok Rum, the Lepcha God of Music. She not only entertains her community and others with her melodious voice but also engage herself in training the young generations in Lepcha traditional songs and music. The century old Lepcha culture gets a new dimension in the harmonious, melodious and musical tune of Renue Hildamit Lepcha. Through her song and music knowingly or unknowingly Renue Hildamit Lepcha has contributed a lot in preserving Lepcha

culture, custom and tradition. She saved the young generations to flow in the current of modernization and westernization. Renue Hildamit Lepcha successfully brings back the young generations from the influence of Hindi and English songs and music to their community song and dance. Her cassettes are popularly used in most functions and occasions and the young Lepchas are seen to put their steps together in dancing and capering about with her song. She is the rescuer, savior, protector, and preserver of Lepcha culture, custom and tradition. Renue Hildamit Lepcha is one of the champions who worked for the protection, preservation, conservation and maintenance of the Lepcha culture, custom, belief and tradition.

Lepchas are proud of the couple, Lapon Sonam Tshering Lepcha and Renue Hildamit Lepcha, for receiving the India's prestigious civilian Padma Shri award. The couple made the community pompous, overconfident, proud and make them known to the outside world. The couple has been dedicated themselves for the cause of the Lepchas. They are the key personalities of the present day who play significant role in protecting, preserving, maintaining, reviving and flourishing Lepcha culture, custom, beliefs and religion. Lapon Sonam Thering and Renue Hildamit are blessed by Tarbongthing and Narip Naom, the first couple in Lepcha society. Lepchas need many more such couple in their society. May Lord Tamsangthing, the Lepcha God, give a long life to both the personalities so that they together can serve the community and contribute in regaining their lost cultural status in the region.

Acknowledgement

I am thankful to Lapon Sonam Tshering Lepcha, Padma Shri Awardee and husband of Renue Hildamit Lepcha for supplying all the information for the article.

Renue Ruth Karthak Lepchani
Heroine of Sikkim Democratic Movement

Renue Ruth Karthak Lepchani, the lone Lepcha heroine of Sikkim democratic movement, was born on 12 May 1934 (or 1936) at Arithang, Gangtok, Sikkim. Her father Chandralal Karthak was a Lepcha but her mother was a Bhutia from Gyansapa clan from Tinki Tam of West Sikkim. Ruth was the eldest daughter of her parents and had five younger brothers. She lost her mother during her school days on August 20, 1948. Bag Singh Karthak Lepcha, who was one of the General Secretaries of the Government of Sikkim, was her maternal grandfather. Her grandfather was a Lepcha while her grandmother was a Nepali. Her grandfather was the General Secretary to the Maharaja of Sikkim. Renue Ruth Karthak carried the blood of all the three major communities (Lepcha, Bhutia and Nepali) of Sikkim in her vein and, thus, in true sense of the term Ruth can be identified as 'Daughter of Sikkim'.

During her school days, Renue Ruth Karthak Lepchani was a brilliant student of Paljor Namgyal Girl's High School, Gangtok and passed School Seminar in 1951. She then joined P.G. Hospital (now Seth Suklal Karnani Hospital) in Calcutta for five years advanced course in nursing. She met Md. Ahsan Abdul Halim, a Calcutta based Muslim businessman as a patient in the hospital and fell in love with him. Ruth got married with Md. Ahsan Halim in Calcutta at the age of 21 on 8 December, 1956. She was born and brought up in the Christian family but after marriage she had to adjust herself in Muslim culture and style of life.

Socio- Political History of Sikkim:

During those days Sikkim was under monarchical rule. Ruth came back to Sikkim in 1955 as a young, energetic nurse with the intension to serve the people of the state particularly the Lepchas. She was deeply shocked by the pathetic socio-economic condition

of the Lepchas of Sikkim under the monarchical rule. She noticed how the Lepchas lost their land and became helots in their own land. Although she was carrying the blood of her Bhutia mother but she was moved by the Chogyel's tyrannical rule towards the simple, innocent and aboriginal Lepchas of Sikkim. She inherited more of Lepcha heart from her father than those of Bhutia heart from her mother or Nepali heart from her grandmother. In fact, Renue Ruth Karthak Lepchani was very soft and kind hearted lady and after judging the socio-economic condition of the different ethnic groups of Sikkim she became very much sympathetic towards the Lepchas. She observed and touched by the pathetic condition of the Lepchas living in the village areas. All the intruders are found to be much better and well off at the cost of the aboriginal simple Lepchas. Once she remarked "I saw their property being taken by the Bhutia settlers who were treated as first class citizens by the Chogyal whereas my own people were neglected to the status of third class citizens. The Lepchas were slowly being deprived of all opportunities in employment, economic benefits and they were gradually reduced to a minority by the anti Lepcha policy of the Durbar" (Himalayan Observer, March 15, 1969). Her feelings about the Lepchas were reflected at the 30th Annual Conference of Bharatiya Adimjati Sangh held at Gauhati from 6 to 11 November 1978. She dominated the Conference which took the following resolutions about the Lepchas:

• Resolution I — "Lepchas are the Adimjatis and original inhabitants of Sikkim that is the primitive Schedule Tribe. The ruler Bhutia landlord immigrants in Sikkim are settlers as much as the Nepalese. Only the Lepchas should be considered the real Scheduled Tribe in Sikkim and given special protection.

• Resolution II – That only tribal with incomes less than Rs. 200/- p.m. or owing less than three acres of land should be benefited from Tribal Sub-plan of the Sixth Plan of India.

• Resolution III — The Lepcha community be given special protection over and above the Tribal Sub-plan if Nepalese and Bhutiyas are made Scheduled Tribes in Sikkim." (North Eastern Herald. April, 1979. P- 10).

Long after the resolution, very recently both the Lepchas and the government of Sikkim have realized the necessity and pressurizing the Central Government of India for the inclusion of the Lepchas under the category of Primitive Tribal Group so as to extend some special protection for them. Ruth was a far sighted Lepcha leader who could realize the necessity of separating Lepchas from other tribal groups of Sikkim. Lepchas require some special kind of treatment from the government for their overall development in their own homeland.

Lepchas used to call their land Mayel Lyang which was sparsely populated and covered with dense forest. In the early days the land was inhabited and ruled absolutely by the Lepchas but they permanently lost their land firstly to the Tibetan rulers through the 'Friendship Blood Treaty' signed between Khy Bumsa, the Tibetan leader and Thi Kung Tek, the Lepcha Boongthing (priest) and chieftain. The Treaty was signed during 13 Century at Kabi Nangsal, North Sikkim. The government of Sikkim has constructed the statues of the signatories and protected and preserved Kabi Nangsal as one of the historical important places of Sikkim. The Blood Treaty paved the way for long 332 years (1642 – 1975) Namgyal dynasty in Sikkim until the land was merged with India as its 22 State with effect from 26 April 1975 by the Constitution of India (thirty Sixth) Amendment Act 1975.

Before Namgyal rule, Lepchas were the rulers of their own land which was spread from Kanchenjunga in the north up to Titalia (now in Bangladesh) in the south and from Tagang La, Thong La and Rudak river (now in Bhutan) in the east up to Tamar river, Arun river and Koshi river (now in Nepal) in the west. The boundary of the original Lepcha land was next to fixed. Maharaja Thutob

Namgyal and Maharani Yeshi Dolma of Sikkim in their *Hstory of Sikkim* mentioned the boundaries of their country as: "They were Dipdala in the North, Shingsa Dag-pay, Walung, Yongmag Khangchen Yarlung and Timer Chorten in the West, down along the Arun and Dud Kosi Rivers, down to the Maha lodi Nuxalbari, Titalia in the South, on the East Tagong La and Tang La on the North" (Maharaja & Maharani Dolma, 1908). Although Lepchas have their own language and script but no detail records of the rulers are available. It is told that all authentic Lepcha records and documents were burnt to ashes by the then Namgyal rulers near Gayzing which caused a big crack in the stone. G.B. Mainwaring, the noted writer of Lepcha Grammar remarks "the earlier veritable information I can acquire of their history, commerce from the time of king Turve, who, apparently, reigned about 450 years ago …. After the death of king Turve, three successive Lepchas, (Tur-Sang Pa-no, Tur-Ageng Pa-no and Tur-Agek Pa-no) sons of their Royal Fathers, ruled the land." (Mainwaring, 1976). Dharani Dhar Dahal mentions about King Pohar- Taak-Panu as the first Lepcha king who ruled them during 330 – 320 BC. But most historians and scholars on Lepchas accepted Turve Panu as the first king/ chieftain for the Lepchas.

Thi Kung Tek was the 32nd direct descendent of Thi Kung Azor Boongthing, the first Boongthing (priest) of the Lepchas. (Tamsang, 1983). It is told that Thi Kung Azor Boongthing was created by God and was blessed with super natural power to punish and kill Laso Mung Pano, the great devil. Thi Kung Tek like his great great grandfather also possessed super natural power and blessed Khy Bumsa with three sons. Khy-Bumsa, the main signatory of Blood Treaty on the Tibetan side, possessed the strength of seventeen persons but was childless. Phuntsho Namgyal, the first Tibetan king of Sikkim was the fifth descendent of Khy Bumsa. Anyway, Lepchas were the lone inhabitants and rulers of their own land before the Tibetans came and rule Sikkim.

Lepcha society is casteless but it is clan based. They are divided into a number of clans which they call *Pu-tso or Agith* (popularly known as *Moo*). Karthak is one of the important and dominant clan among the so many clans present among the Lepchas of Sikkim. One story says that before Namgyal rule Karthaks were the rulers of Sikkim. The present generations of Karthak Moo feel proud and believe to be the descendents of the ruling class of earlier Sikkim. They still believe that in spite of the Blood Treaty the Tibetans had to defeat the Karthak King in a battle that took place in Kabhi Lung Chuk, North Sikkim. The grandfather of Ruth believed that she was the reincarnated daughter of Goddess Kanchenjunga and was sent by the Goddess to rescue the Lepchas from the bondage and oppression of Tibetan rule.

Political and Social involvement

Renue Ruth Karthak Lepchani had no faith in monarchical rule of Sikkim because she believed that rulers were imported from Tibet only to rule and suppress the indigenous Lepchas. She strongly recommended that the condition of the Lepchas can be improved only by releasing them out of the clutches of the Tibetan rulers. She played an important role in the field on democratic movement in Sikkim and was one of the key personalities in merging Sikkim with the Indian Union. She was a horror to the Chogyals of Sikkim.

Renue Ruth Karthak Lepchani was a leader of the common people. She was jailed and interned for six times within 12 years for the cause of the common people of the State. Although details about her arrest and successive happenings are not available, but it may be inferred with certainty that she had to suffer a lot both during the Chogyal's monarchical rule and Kazi's democratic rule. She was first arrested by the Royal Police on March 23, 1967 in Singtam on ground of sedition. The judgment for her arrest came after nearly 20 months of detention in Gangtok jail. Without

mentioning any cause, the Sikkim Police also arrested Md. Ahsan Abdul Halim, the husband of Renue Ruth Karthak and sent him to jail along with his wife. After examining the witness the Magistrate made the following judgment:

"From the evidence of this witness it is clear that the accused was attempting to induce the ideas that the Chogyal and his government was a partisan on favouring one community against another and were obviously asked them not to obey Chogyal and his government. She fully knew that by her telling these to the simple villagers like this witness, a sense of discontentment would be created in them and stirred up opposition to the Chogyal and the government established by the law of Sikkim and would incite them to insurrection of sedition as contemplated in section 124 A as applied to Sikkim." (Himalayan Observer, Nov 30, 1968).

The statement of the Magistrate identified Ruth was a representative of one community i.e. the Lepchas of Sikkim and targeted her as against the Tibetan rulers.

In the *History of Democratic Movement*, Gopal Gaunley and others (2002) wrote:

"In 1967, the Chief Magistrate's Court, Gangtok filed her name in criminal case under section 78. In it she was alleged to have broken the law and thereby invited IPC section 124. Explaining the allegation she stated the following:

1. I was implicated for having held the view that the then ruler was not the real ruler of Sikkim. The real ruler of Sikkim was Tharing, who was then chased to Delhi. Chogyal is a Bhutia, but the real rulers of Sikkim are the Lepchas.

2. Present Chogyal, the ruler of Sikkim has no right to rule over Sikkim. After the end of election in Sikkim, I shall go to Delhi and take the ballot papers of the Lepchas. The Lepchas have decided to give their ballot papers to me. I shall submit a memorandum to the government of India and request them to alleviate the sufferings of the Lepchas.

3. I dislike the continuance of the rule of the Chogyal.

4. There is suppression of Lepchas in Sikkim. The Sikkimese palace is bringing 5000 Tibetans in Sikkim. The palace is not only plotting to settle them here, but they are also plotting to give them Sikkimise subjects.

5. To follow such a policy is to harm the interest of the Lepchas. For a long time the case continued in the court and after fleecing her in entirely she was sent on exile from the state." (Gaunley,2002).

It was learnt that Md. Ahsan Abdul Halim, husband of Renue Ruth Karthak was arrested and jailed under Sikkim Security Act on a charge of attempt to commit suicide and was deported from Sikkim on January 3, 1968. The Chief Secretary, Government of Sikkim, Gangtok, issued an Order under the provision of Sub rule (1) of Rule 10 of the Sikkim Police Security Rule 1962. It states: "Mr Ahan Abdul Halim, shall remove himself from Sikkim by the mid night of 3 January 1968 and shall not thereafter return to Sikkim." (Himalayan Observer. Jan. 6: 1968). He was forcefully taken to Rangpo outpost and handed over to Indian Police.

On November 15, 1968, Ruth was sentenced to undergo two years rigorous imprisonment by the Chief Magistrate of Sikkim. But before the completion of the sentence she was expelled from Sikkim with injunctions not to enter Sikkim again. During this time she stayed sometime in Kalimpong and thereafter left for Calcutta to join her husband. In Kalimpong Ruth made the statement "I was afraid of some other plot being hatched by the Sikkim bureaucrats who cannot suffer my presence in Sikkim among the masses, they hate me. I did not go to my home in Chisopaney. My house has been sealed by the Police ever since I was put in jail. I had some money left in the bank. The Sikkim Police was shadowing me. Although I was advised to go and took my personal things at Chisopaney, I did not believe that I was free from the spidery nest of Sikkim government. So I ran for freedom. The release order

which snatched away my birth right a lawful citizen of Sikkim virtually rendered my status to that of a stateless person. I thought of only way to escape, and made my way for India immediately." (Himalayan Observer. March 15, 1969).

After 1973 things in Sikkim began to change and atmosphere was created for setting up democratic structure in Sikkim. Ruth entered Sikkim with the expectation of getting back her house, property and to regain her lost political position. But Ruth was expelled by an Order issued by B.B.Lal, the Chief Executive, Government of Sikkim under the provision of Home and Police Department notification No 4081/ H.P. Jan. 1956. She did not challenge the order in the court and opined that there cannot be any justice under the Chogyal rule and the democratic government was following the old Chogyal rule. Shocked by the treatment which was unexpected to her, Ruth Karthak went back to Calcutta to meet and stay with her husband.

In 1966, Ruth formed *The Sikkim Independent Front*, a new political Party to fight against the Chogyal rule in Sikkim. She became the first General Secretary of the party. She formed the party basically to fight and save the Lepchas against the tyrannical Chogyal rule. She believed that the condition of the Lepchas can be improved by establishing democracy in the state. She continued her struggle even after merger of Sikkim with India and took part in election process for forming government in the State. She was the leader of the poor and deprived section of the society. The slogan for the second legislative election was "Poor of the world unite. It is our wealth, our health, our strength, our salvation – we have nothing to lose; but our poverty, misery and slavery." (North Eastern Herald, April 9, 1979). 'Pukar' was the party newspaper through which she used to announce to all party programme, election manifesto, name of the candidates, and also took part in the election debate. It was the important media through which she could reach the common people of Sikkim very easily and comfortably.

Ruth nominated six candidates (five Lepcha and one Nepali) on her Party ticket to contest in the State Legislative Election of 1966. With the support of the Front she wanted to protect the interest of the Lepchas in Sikkim. But Sikkim Election Officers during scrutiny rejected all the nomination papers of the Front candidates on the ground that the nomination papers were not supported by the Sikkim subject hood certificates. Out of frustration and protest Ruth gave a call for mass boycott of the election.

Sikkim became the 22nd state of India since April 26, 1975. Renue Ruth entered Sikkim during the parliamentary election of 1977 with the expectation of contesting the election as Janata Party candidate. But again she was arrested. After a lot of harassesment from the Sikkim administration, Ruth filed her nomination paper as independent candidate. The Lok Sabha election result for the lone candidate of Sikkim held on March 1, 1977 was : K.B. Chettri (Cong): 1,09,520; Ratanal Brahmin (CPIM): 91,040; Madan K. Rai (Ind); 32,835; Amar Prakash Dimnal (GL): 12,509; D.S.Basnet (Ind): 4,306; Janak Lal Agarwal (Ind): 4,098; Binoy Mohan Bhatt (Ind): 3,984; Bal Bhr Sing Gahatry (Ind): 1,925;Thakur Prasad (Ind):1,109; Ruth Karthak Lepchani (Ind): 627. The poor performance of Ruth in the general election may be due to her long absence from the State and hence lack of close connection with common people and her non representation from any organized political party.

After the Lok Sabha election with the intervention of the Central Janata Party leaders, Ruth could get her house and property at Chisopaney back. But her name was struck off from the voters list of Sikkim. Even after merger with India and setting democracy in the State, Renue Ruth Karthak was not enjoying democratic right in her own State where she was born and brought up. Between 1975 and 1977, Ruth was jailed and interned five times by the Kazi Lhendup Dorjee Government which was

following the same Tibetan or Chogyal Namgyal rule. Sikkim even today is enjoying a special status under Article 371 – F of Indian Constitution. Sikkim becomes a democratic province of India but it fails to fulfill the aspirations of the downtrodden Lepchas and their leaders.

Her concern about the pitiable condition of the Lepchas was reflected in one of her articles entitled 'Developmental problems and the Lepchas' published in S.C.Deogaonkar (ed) book 'Problems of Development of Tribal Areas' in 1980. The tribal leader like a critical academician not only raised the problems of the indigenous tribe of Sikkim but also suggested the possible solutions for the Lepchas. The article states that "the first and foremost problem of these aborigines (Lepchas) is that they have been disposed in their own lands. Just because an outsider has acquired willy-nilly, and in some instances even with the connivance of the ruling government, a piece of paper which says that for a paltry sum of money the land which belonged to these guileless people for centuries now belongs to a stranger and not to them any more." Her suggestion lies in declaring all "sale of (Lepcha) land illegal and nationalization of all lands for the benefit of the tillers". The condition of the Lepchas can be improved by restoring their land, and educating them to exploit their land for their improvement. "They must be taught not to depend on liquor which is also being encouraged by the government. They should be given initial capital money as outright grant. All business activities must have at least 40 per cent participation through cooperatives and, above all they must have protection for a minimum number of years till they reach independent sustenance capacity." Ruth identifies three main hurdles in solving the problems connected to land acquisition: i) distrust, suspicion and disbelief of the Tibetans who captured Lepcha land most illegally even by forcibly marrying their women folk, ii) irresponsible, absolutely unresponsive and lack any sense of proprietorship of the Lepcha character and iii)

government interference and make the Lepchas free from bureaucratic control. Ruth also criticizes the central government for declaring Bhutia landlord class as Scheduled Tribe in Sikkim at par with the Adimjati Lepchas. She considered Lepchas as the only ST of Sikkim and declaring others in the same category is the other name of opening "them (Lepchas) up to further exploitation even after 300 years. This, in my opinion is a retrograde and inhuman decision and ought to be undone with utmost haste."

To conclude, Renue Ruth Karthak Lepchani is the lone Lepcha women from Sikkim who could dedicate her life for the common people particularly for the Lepchas of Sikkim. Her sufferings for the people of Sikkim are legendary and make history in Sikkim. She spearheaded the sense of consciousness among the Lepchas and placed them with honour and rehabilitation in their own homeland. She took upon herself indescribable sufferings in jail in Gangtok and internment from Sikkim. She is the most self sacrificing champion of the Lepcha cause. She should be identified as one of the foremost freedom fighters that India has produced so far. She nullified all such statements that made by different authors on Lepchas as shy, docile, simple, introvert, lazy, accommodative etc. She was as strong, both physically and mentally, as any other leaders and was above the average standard of any women leader of the country. She possessed an exemplary character which makes all the Lepchas proud. Her dedication, commitment and loyalty towards the common people particularly towards the Lepchas are unquestionable and for which she will be remembered in the history of the country for a long period. Her grandfather adorned Ruth as the reincarnated 'Daughter of the Goddess Kanchenjunga'. She will be remembered for her work and contribution on Lepcha – Nepali harmony in Sikkim. Her position and role as social reformer and rescuer of the Lepchas of Sikkim surpassed her involvement in the political affairs of the State. She was more a leader of the Lepchas than a leader of the State. In fact,

her political affiliation was intentional and targeted to acquire power for the betterment of the Lepchas. She considered herself as a leader of the Lepchas and joined politics as a stepping stone to bring back the lost status and position of the Lepchas in the State.

Renue Ruth Karthak Lepchani was a revolutionary social worker not only for the State of Sikkim but in a sense for the country as a whole. During Janata rule she established good rapport and relations with the central ministers and leaders. She along with her husband formed an 'All India Forum for the Unemployed Youths'. They believed that there can be no equality so long as the system of inheritance exits. They believed in the revolutionary idea that after one's death, his/her property should become public property. During her exile in Calcutta, Ruth was fortunate in meeting people who have dedicated themselves in rebuilding India – morally, economically and she received their blessings for her work in Sikkim. She was a leader par excellence and will be remembered in the history of India for rebuilding Sikkim from authoritarianism to its present democratic shape.

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RENUE SABITRI DEVI LEPCHA
(1902 – 1980)

Renue Helen Lepcha

The Lepcha Woman Freedom Fighter of Darjeeling Hills

Women's contribution in Indian freedom struggle is well recognized and tested over time. But history tells more about 'His — Story' and much less about 'Her – Story'. Even then some of the historically recognized prominent women freedom fighters are: Sarojini Naidu, Matangini Hazra, Pritilata Wadedar, and the others. Beside these few forefront leaders, a good number of fighters stayed at the back of the screen and whose contribution neither been recorded in the national history nor they are well recognized at the regional level. But their dedication, sacrifice, devotion, loyalty, patriotism is unquestionable and their fruits are being enjoyed by the present generations without shameless mention and recognition about their contribution. One and perhaps the only such woman freedom fighter from Darjeeling hills was Renue Helen Lepcha who is popularly known as Sabitri Devi. She was a radicalist leader who wanted to revolutionize against the British rule. The present article aims at recording and reproducing some of her activities to the present generation and keeps it ready for future references.

Renue Helen Lepcha (1902/03 —1980) is popularly known as Sabitri Devi not only in the hills but throughout the country as her rename was given by none other than Mahatma Gandhi himself. Mrs Indira Gandhi called her Sailididi (in Nepali Saili is the third daughter of a person).

Renue Helen Lepcha was born in Kurseong in the year 1902 or 1903. Her father Achung Lepcha originally hailed from Namchi, Sikkim. Renue Helen Lepcha was the third (saili) among the seven daughters of Achung Lepcha. She had her school education from Scots Mission School, Kurseong and was not interested for higher education and left school in 1916. Her permanent residence was at Galvin Street, Kurseong, Darjeeling.

Renue Helen Lepcha was the first and the only Lepcha lady from Darjeeling hills who took active part in Indian freedom fighting. Inspired by Gandhiji's non violence movement, Helen Lepcha left for Calcutta in 1918 and stayed with her elder sister and joined one centre to learn the art of making thread with 'charka' (spinning wheel). She become so efficient and expert within very short period of time that the Bengal Board of Charka made her leader to take part in one Khadi and Charka Exhibition organized at Muzaffarpur, Behar. Her expertise in the exhibition made her popular not only in Bihar but she became familiar to the leaders of the all India Congress Party. Later on in 1920 her dedicated service for the flood affected areas of Bihar made her an all India leader. As a result Mahatma Gandhi invited her to visit Sabarmati Ashram where Helen Lepcha was renamed as Sabitri Devi by Bapuji. Most probably Gandhiji smelt some foreign touch in the name of Helen and made her swadeshi by pure Indian name. Following Gandhiji's instruction, her areas of activity extended over different coal field areas of Bengal, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh but she was confined to Patna, Danapur, Bankipur and Jharia. The common people in these areas accepted her leadership and joined Indian freedom fighting. She attended All India Congress Conference held at Ahmedabad and met top leaders of congress including Sarojini Naidu. Later she led a procession from coal field area of Jharia to the gathering at Mahammad Ali Park, Calcutta and there met Mahatma Gandhi, Chittaranjan Das, Moulana Abul Kalam Azad, Smt Urmila Devi, Smt Swarup Rani and others. Due to all these activities she was disliked by the British ruler and was kept under observation and restraint by the Police. But this could not control her from taking part in different non violent activities, processions and boycott of foreign goods. During one boycott of foreign goods and setting them fire at Siliguri, Sabitri Devi and with twelve others were arrested and accused for three months laborious imprisonment in Darjeeling jail. The Amrita Bazer Patrika in its issue on 30 January 1922 wrote

“Sabitri Devi with the Congress Secretary and E. Ahmed and Gorkha volunteers have been arrested”. After release from jail she was home interned and was not allowed to leave Kurseong. Even then she was not stepped back from her involvement in direct freedom struggle. She remained one of the undisputed leaders of congress party and freedom fighter of the hill district of Darjeeling.

To meet ailing C.R.Das, Mahatma Gandhi came to Darjeeling sometime during 1925-26. It is told that when Sabitri Devi met Gandhiji she was dressed herself with gold ornaments. Gandhiji was annoyed with Renue Helen Lepcha and told her to live simple life and urged to donate all her ornaments for the Swaraj Fund. Renue Helen Lepcha instantly donated all her ornaments for the Swaraj Fund. Since then she never used any sort of golden or silver ornaments in her life time. She was a dedicated freedom fighter and true follower of Mahatma Gandhi. She led a simple life and never used and sort of luxury articles in her life even after independence. She was a congressman by the true sense of the term. The Darjeeling district is proud of having such a dedicated lady freedom fighter and patriot of the nation.

Netaji Subash Chandra Bose spent sometimes at Gidde hills, Kurseong where Sarat Chandra Bose, elder brother of Netaji had a residence. Sisir Kumar Bose, nephew who accompanied Netaji during his escape, mentioned in his book *Mahaniskraman* about Netaji’s stay at Kurseong. He mentioned that after his gall bladder operation, Netaji came to Kurseong for rest in June 1936 and left for Calcutta before winter started. For the second and last time, Netaji along with Sarat Chandra Bose, elder brother, Sisir Kumar Bose, nephew and others visited Kurseong during puja vacation (October- November of 1937) and left for Calcutta to attend General Conference of Congress where Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru and others attended. He was house arrested by the British Police and Helen Lepcha was assigned the work of supplying bread etc for Netaji. It is said that Renue Helen Lepcha

played an important role in supplying secret letters, information and even dresses for Netaji during his house arrest. M.P.Rai in his book 'Bir Jatiko Amar Kahahi' has mentioned that Sabitri Devi helped Netaji to escape from his house arrest at Kurseong to reach Europe through Kabul. In 1976, the Directory of Indian Women Today writes:

Savitri Devi; First Lepcha Freedom Fighter. b.1903. Her original name was Helen, Gandhiji renamed her 'Savitri Devi' when she went to Sabarmati Ashram on his invitation. Her area of activity was Jharia Coal Fields, Bankipur, Danapur, Patna,etc. Used to lead large processions protesting against the British regime. Lived in Anand Bhavan also for some time. Was the first woman to be elected Municipal Commissioner of Kharsang Municipality. Helped Netaji Subash Chandra Bose escape from imprisonment in Kharsang and migrate to Germany through Kabul. Even at this advanced age, she is an active social and political worker. Was awarded TAMRA PATRA in 1972. (Source: M.P.Rai –Bir Jatiko Amar Kahani . Aajako Sikkim Prakashan. Gangtok. 1992. page-226).

The present write up is not a critical historical study but the period of Netaji's stay at Kurseong and his migration to Kabul does not tally. But obviously it is not 1939-40 as mentioned by both M.P.Rai and Jiwan Labor as the period of Netaj's stay at Kurseong. There are enough reasons to believe that he stayed at Kurseong during 1936-37 as mentioned by Sisir Chandra Bose. It also seems unlikely that the whole plan of Netaj's escape from India to Kabul was prepared at Kurseong. Netaji was arrested and kept at Presidency jail during July- December, 1940 and left from India for Kabul on 17 January 1941. Hence his stay at Kurseong (1936-37) and decision of migration (in 1941) does not tally. The story of stitching *kurta payjama* at Kurseong (M.P.Rai – Bir Jatiko Amar Kahani, page 226) and purchase of the same from the shop of Washem Molla Dharmatala, Calcutta by Miah Akbar Shah who helped Netaji on the other side of the boarder (Bose, S.K), does not

match each other. However, we like to refer the matter to the historians by recognizing the fact that Renue Helen Lepcha played an important role during the period when Netaji stayed at Kurseong.

Renue Helen Lepcha had close link with the top leaders of Bengal freedom fighters in particular and the all India leaders in general. She was not only close with Netaji Subash Chandra Bose but was known to Deshbandhu Chittaranjan Das, Mahammad Ali, Sarat Chandra Bose and others. Even after independence she maintained personal relation with the Nehru family and stayed at Anand Bhawan at Allahabad which was the centre of policy making for the Congress party. Some of the top leaders of the country like Motilal Nehru, Jawaharlal Nehru, Morarji Bhai Desai, Lala Jagat Narayan, Sashidas, and Sir Ambika Prasad knew Renue Helen Lepcha by her name. She was very favourite to Indira Gandhi from her childhood and used to call her as Sailididi. In one occasion on her way to Darjeeling, Indira Gandhi send her personal messenger by stopping her car at Kurseong and took Helen Lepcha on her vehicle to Darjeeling. This showed her strong personality and close link with the top leaders of the country.

Beside her involvement in freedom struggle, Helen Lepcha was a social worker and worked for the common people of the hills. She was elected as Commissioner of Kurseong Municipality in 1936 and worked for the betterment of the municipal area. She was reelected as the commissioner for the second term also. She was the leader not only for the Lepchas but she was above all communal feelings and worked for all communities of the hill people. She was unanimously and simultaneously worked as the President of the Lepcha Association, Sherpa Association, Anjuman Islamia of Kurseong and District Congress party. Till her death she worked as the Mandal of Kurseong region. Involvement and holding highest position in different organizations show strong personality, acceptable leadership and secular character of her life.

She was well accepted and respected by all sections of the people of Kurseong. It was so much so that different religious groups in Kurseong demanded her dead body for performing the last rites according to their respective religious norms and customs. She was so close to each religion that all considered her to be the believer of their religion. This shows that Helen Lepcha never neglect or ignore any religion. She was secular by heart and may be considered as a role model for the others. She was a leader by herself.

During silver jubilee celebration of Indian independence, the Government of India honoured and awarded Renue Helen Lepcha with Tanra Patra and conferred pension meant for the freedom fighters. Mrs Indira Gandhi, the then Prime Minister honoured and handed over the same to her beloved Sailididi on 15 August 1972. The Tribal Welfare Department, Government of West Bengal honoured and recognized her with the 'Reward to Tribal Headman of the District'. The Governor of West Bengal handed over the reward on 1 June 1958 at Shurbery Ground, Raj Bhawan, Darjeeling.

Renue Helen Lepcha died on 18 August 1980 at Planters Hospital, Darjeeling. Her body was brought to Kurseong where in the next day all flocks of life irrespective of their caste, creed and religion gathered to show their last respect to the departed soul. To satisfy all religious groups, the procession had to move through all the major temples, churches, gumbas and mosques located in Kurseong. The hill lost its lone woman freedom fighter but Helen Lepcha will be remembered in the minds of the people for ever. She was not only the only woman freedom fighter from among the Lepchas but she remained the only woman freedom fighter from the hilly region of Darjeeling. The Lepchas are proud to have a woman freedom fighter like Renue Helen Lepcha among them from the hills of Darjeeling.

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Thikoong General George Byres Mainwaring
A More Lepcha than Most Lepchas

Thikoong General George Byres Mainwaring, popularized in Lepcha world as G.B.Mainwaring, is known for his pioneering, painstaking, original and authentic contribution in the Lepcha language. The Lepcha language, which was once the national language of earlier independent Sikkim, had turned into a simple dialect of the few people. “The Lepcha language which had, hitherto, been the language of the whole country of Sikim, which all Tibetans, Butias, or others who entered the country acquired and spoke, in which under the rule of Colonel Llyod, business was carried on, and justice in the English Courts administered, in the character of which, decrees and documents were written and recorded; - this language was completely set aside, and Hindustani was made the chief language in Dorjeling” (Mainwaring, 1876). Lepcha language has been revived and recognized as one of the official languages of Sikkim under the patronage of Government of Sikkim. But on the other part of the hills, in Darjeeling district, where majority of the Lepchas of the State are residing, no initiative has ever been taken by the government to protect and safeguard the Lepcha language.

A community lives through its culture and language. Language not only gives oxygen to the individual but it is the single most important marker of identification of the community. Seeing the deplorable condition of Lepcha language, Thikoong Mainwaring was very much shocked and did not hesitate in expressing his distress. “To allow the Lepcha race, and language to die out would indeed be most barbarous, and inexpressibly sad” (Mainwaring, 1876).

With the advent of the Tibetans in Sikkim during the middle of seventeenth century, the downfall of the Lepchas started. “They

(Tibetans) collected and destroyed the manuscript books of the Lepchas; and translated into Lepcha parts of their own mythological works, under the name of Tashi-sung, (History of Tashi), thus giving the pure and unsullied name of Tashi, (which single and invisible God, the Lepchas had hitherto worshipped with all the simplicity and purity of children), to a foul and fabulous incarnation, whose pretended life, they published, and this, (with the indoctrination of a host of other deities), they preached to the Lepchas as gospel" (Mainwaring, 1876). The work of throttling Lepcha language was started by the Tibetans but in the process the last nail was put by the Europeans in the coffin. "The advent of the Europeans was the first real blow the Lepchas received; their downfall quickly followed" (Mainwaring, 1876).

It is true that the Lepchas were known and popularized in the outside world by the Europeans. The Europeans, be whatever reasons behind, were the person who took initiative in developing, safeguarding and publicizing Lepcha language and literature. Some of the well known Europeans whose contribution is remarkable in the Lepcha world are: J.D.Hooker (1855), E.T.Dalton (1872), G.B.Mainwaring (1876, 1898), A.Grunwedel (1898), F.Donaldson (1900), LSS O'Malley (1907), J.C.White (1909), C.De. B. Stock (1925), G.Gorer (1938), J.Morris (1938), M.Hermonns (1954), R.Shafer (1955), W.R.V.Nebesky (1956), C.Nakane (1958, 1966), H.Siiger (1967), H.Plaisier (2005), J.Bentley (2007), K.Little (2008) and others. Of these European scholars, anthropologists, travelers, botanists, linguists, soldiers, administrators etc., "the most colourful person who has ever studied the Lepchas is undoubtedly General G.B.Mainwaring" (Sigger, 1967). He took the leading role in understanding the Lepchas properly and contributed enormously for the cause of the Lepchas. K.P.Tamsang observed that "Lieutenant General G B Mainwaring, Bengal Staff Corps, the one and the only Westerner who thoroughly mastered the Lepcha language and, to this day, remains unsurpassed and supreme

amongst foreigners on the Lepcha language and literature" (Tamsang,1980).

It is only Thikoong G.B.Mainwaring who devoted and spent many years among the Lepchas (nearly twenty-five years) and become more a Lepcha than many of the Lepchas. General Mainwaring made a solitary effort in developing Lepcha language. "In contrast to the Christian missionaries and the Buddhist Lamas, he (Mainwaring) not prompted by any ulterior motive. In the course of his duties in the Darjeeling Hills, he came in contact with the Lepchas. He found them plain, simple and innocent, and thus he was gradually drawn towards these people. Their customs, manners and way of life so much attracted him that he is said to have even married a Lepcha woman so that, through the family relationship, he could learn everything about the tribe" (Foning; 1987). Thikoong Mainwaring was, indeed, not a Lepcha by birth but he was a perfect Lepcha in the true sense of the term. He married a Lepcha woman, dressed up Lepcha costume, spoke Lepcha language, thought like a Lepcha, and above all his mind set was like a true Lepcha. His love, respect and affection to the Lepcha culture and literature is reflected through his life and writings.

G.B.Mainwaring: A Brief Biography:

Thikoong George Byres Mainwaring was born in India on 18 July 1825 while his father, George Mainwaring, was serving in the Bengal Civil service. He received his first name 'George' from his father, George Mainwaring and middle name 'Byres' from his mother, Isabella Byres. Thikoong G.B.Mainwaring hails from an aristocratic family of Cavenagh-Mainwaring from Whitemore and Budduph in Staffordshire. In his childhood he completed his schooling at Aberdeen, Scotland and then he was sent to Wimbledon for higher education in Classics and Mathematics.

At the age of seventeen, young Mainwaring was commissioned into the 16th Bengal Native Infantry and on 8th

January 1842 he sailed for India. For his outstanding contribution in the Battle of Maharajpur, young Mainwaring was awarded with 'Gwalior Campaign Bronze Star' in 1843. He took part in the first Sikh War of 1845-46, wars of Moodki, Ferozashapur and Sabraon. Due to his able participation and bravery contribution in the war, Mainwaring was awarded with 'Sutlej Campaign Medal' in 1846.

After the battle of Ferozashapur and Sabraon, there was some dramatic change in the young Mainwaring's life and he diverted his mind and got interest in learning Indian languages. Very soon he became master in both Hindustani and Urdu languages. In 1854 he left for England and spent three years at home. He returned India in 1857 when India was passing through the period of Sepoy Mutiny or first war of Indian independence. The British Government used the expertise of Mainwaring in Indian languages and employed him as interpreter with 42nd and 49th Highlanders. As interpreter he was first posted at Kanpur and then at Punjab. By this time he was promoted to the rank of General from Colonel in Bengal Native Infantry. In 1867, Mainwaring was ordered to come to Darjeeling to study Lepcha language and compile a grammar and a dictionary in Lepcha language. A new phase in Mainwaring's life started at Darjeeling and he become champion of the champions in the Lepcha world by writing the first grammar and dictionary in Lepcha language. He stayed sometime at Lebong and then at Poloongdaong below Sukhia in Darjeeling district and learned Lepcha language.

Thikoong G.B.Mainwaring died on 16 January 1893 at Serampur, Hoogly district of Bengal near Calcutta and where he was buried.

Areas of Activity of G.B.Mainwaring:

Thikoong G.B.Mainwaring arrived at Darjeeling by the end of 1867 and the beginning of 1868. He started his career to become an expert in Lepcha language. During his stay at Darjeeling (1867-

1892), Thikoong G.B.Mainwaring came out with two pioneering works in Lepcha language – the first one is a grammar of Lepcha language and the second one is a dictionary of Lepcha language. Both the works are unique, original, pioneering and first of their kinds in Lepcha language. The translations of Namthar, the Buddhist scriptures into Lepcha were of great influenced on Mainwaring's work. "The main source of and the base of Col. Mainwaring's famous Lepcha Grammar, Grunwadel's Dictionary published in Berlin, along with the works of the later Christian missionaries are without doubt, these translated and wonderfully written Namthars in the language" (Foning, 1987).

Lepcha Grammar:

'A grammar of the Rong (Lepcha) language as it Exists in Dorjeling and Sikim Hills' written by Thikoong G.B.Mainwaring and published in 1876 is the first systematic printed Grammar of the Lepchas. It is a wonder that with eight years of his stay among the Lepchas, Mainwaring not only mastered Lepcha language but came out with a Grammar which is the key of Lepcha language and it is the first of its kind and even today it is considered to be the most systematic, scientific and authentic grammar of the Lepchas. It is the first original printed book in the Lepcha language; the earlier printed works were the translation of holy books in Lepcha. The first translation work 'The Genesis and Part of Exodus on Lepsha' was done by K.G.Niebel in 1849 and published by L. Thomas at Baptist Mission Press, Calcutta. Rev William Start and K.G.Niebel were the first independent clergymen who translated parts of Bible like Gospels of Mathews, Mark and John from English to Lepcha during 1840's. Two books were reprinted – 'The Gospel of John' in 1872 and 'The Book of Genesis and Part of Exodus in Lepsha' in 1874. Just two years after these reprints, General Mainwaring's Grammar was printed and gave Lepcha language a sound footing. However, during the period of General Mainwaring,

there was already Lepcha Font at Baptist Mission press, Serampur, near Calcutta and so Mainwaring was "indeed fortunate in having a well designed fount of Lepcha letters ready for him to use, supported by 28 years' experience of printing Lepcha at the Baptist Mission Press, Calcutta" (Sprigg, 2005).

General Mainwaring's Grammar is the first systematic printed grammar of Lepcha language and it is the root of all grammar books written by other writers. Although missionaries like K.B.Niebel and William Start had attempted to compile grammar of Lepchas way back in 1840's when both of them were devoted in translating Bible in Lepcha language. But they could not complete their work and print it and thus Mainwaring's grammar is the first printed grammar of the Lepchas.

Grammar written by Thikoong Mainwaring has 146 pages and has been arranged in six parts: Part I - Alphabet; Part II- Symbolic Scheme; Part III – Parts of Speech, Formative- Etymology; Part IV – Parts of speech. Derivative and Primitive – Etymology; Part V - Parts of speech. Formative and Derivative – Etymology Numeration etc; Part VI – Syntax, Figurative and Honorary speech; Expletives etc.

'The Grammar of the Rong (Lepcha) Language' is important and relevant not only to the linguistics but to all those who are interested and work with the Lepchas. The introductory section of the book comprises twenty-one pages and it contains history, culture, custom, life style, political aspects, literature and what not about the Lepchas. Even today all researchers find the book relevant, authentic and reliable for their reference.

Thikoong Mainwaring was very clear about the purpose of writing the Grammar of the Lepchas. "The Grammar itself is simply written to assist the learner; it does not challenge the strictures of the critic; its mission is alone, to be useful, and should it conduce to the employment of a language and the amelioration of a people,

both of which have been too long neglected, its object will be fully gained" (Mainwaring, 1876).

The Grammar written by Thikoong G.B.Mainwaring "has been of pivotal importance for the survival of the Lepcha language, although it has been criticized because of its strong Latinate bias" (Plaisier, 2007). "This is, of course, impossible, and it has earned him a great deal of ridicule, but his book contains a large number of Lepcha sentences and as a collection of sample phases his book serves a useful purpose" (Sigger, 1967). Nobody can deny the importance of Mainwaring's grammar as the first systematic work particularly when the Lepcha language was passing through deplorable condition. "Unfortunately, General Mainwaring made the structural grammatical principles of Latin the foundation for his analysis and tried to make Lepcha conform to Latin. This is, of course, impossible, and it has earned him a great deal of ridicule, but his book contains a large number of Lepcha sentences (beside many extracted from the missionary translations of the Gospel), and as a collection of sample phases his book serves a useful purpose (Siiger, 1967).

A critical analysis of Thikoong Mainwaring's Grammar on Lepcha language discloses the fact that its positive factors far outweighs the negligible negative effects. "The importance of his work can be gauged from the fact that in 1971, about a century after its publication, his Grammar of the Rong or Lepcha language was reprinted by Bibliotheca Himalayika, an organization whose purpose and aim is to make available works on the civilization and nature of Central Asia, and the Himalayas. His work on the language has without doubt proved to be most valuable; it has srved and still serving as a beacon light for those taking an interest in the language, and to those who aspire to revive the language for posterity" (Foning, 1987).

Following grammar on Lepcha language has been written but Mainwaring's grammar is not only the pioneering work but has been followed by all:

• G.B.Mainwaring, G.B. (1876) *The Grammar of Rong (Lepcha) Language as it exists in Dorjeling and Sikim Hills.* Baptist Mission Press. Calcutta. Reprint (1985) Daya Publishing House. Delhi.

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Reviewing the grammar books written by other scholars, H. Plaisier comments that "these grammar books should not be seen as comprehensive grammatical descriptions of the Lepcha language, but rather as language text books. Both books are of prescriptive nature, apparently written with an audience of language learners in mind. Although both grammars appear to be based on Mainwaring's grammar of 1876, Luksom follows Mainwaring much less than Tamsang does and offers several original and insightful discussions and examples" (Plaisier, 2007).

Lepcha Dictionary:

In the preface of his grammar, Thikoong Mainwaring promised to come out with a Dictionary if "his health and circumstances permit" (Mainwaring, 1876). The materials for the dictionary were collected during 1870's and 1880's. Unfortunately, General Mainwaring could not find it in printed form and after his death the manuscripts were taken to Germany by one of his

colleagues, Albert Grunwedel, a Tibetologist who revised, edited and finally printed the 'Dictionary of the Lepcha Language' from Berlin in 1898. The dictionary was published by order of Her Majesty's Secretary of States for India in Council and it was the first dictionary for the Lepchas. Due to his death, the dictionary could not be published as per the original format of the author. Thikoong Mainwaring was an expert in Lepcha language and originally the dictionary was drafted in Lepcha script but due to some reservation of British government, the book ultimately lost its basic essence and was published in the format where "Lepcha words were given in Lepcha-character, transcribed into Roman and rendered into English, they were arranged in the order of the Lepcha alphabet as set down in Mainwaring's Grammar" (Mainwaring, 1898). In the preface Grunwedel wrote "When the manuscripts of late General Mainwaring were entrusted to the editor it was desired by the British Government, that the type used should be Roman" (Mainwaring, 1898). Dr R.K.Sprigg noted the matter as: "In view of this ill-informed prohibition by the British Government the most that Grunwedel could do to follow the author's wishes was to illustrate the 55 letters of Lepcha script, in both their printed and their written type (x; with corresponding Tibetan letters, for comparison, in both the U-med and the U-can style), followed by two pages of hand-written Lepcha in facsimile form the Berlin manuscript of the *ta-she sung* (Sprigg, 2005).

The Dictionary compiled by General Mainwaring and revised and completed by A.Grunwedel contains 552 pages and can be divided in three parts. The first part (16 pages) contains the preface which is absolutely written by A Grunwedel who mostly narrated the story behind the publication. The second part (454pages) is the Lepcha-English dictionary; of course, the Lepcha alphabets are in Roman character and this is the original work of General G.B.Mainwaring. The third part (96 pages) of the publication contains Index where English-Lepcha format of dictionary is presented by A.Grunwedel.

The Dictionary could not be published as desired by General Mainwaring which is evident from the statement of A.Grunwedel. "The difficulties were very great, the editor having to rewrite and to rearrange the whole of the manuscripts, to excerpt texts (together with a mass of Tibetan matter), to correct the proof sheets, to add new definitions in cases, where he had no Pandit, no assistant to consult, not to mention the fact that the book was to be printed by men, who did not understand the language. He ventures to hope that in this instance the reader will excuse a number of errors and deficiencies, which are indispensable from a work like the present, as well as certain peculiarities in Mainwaring's English orthography which the editor has failed to remove" (Mainwaring, 1898).

Death limits Thikoong Mainwaring to show the Power of Lepcha letters and the Lepcha Dictionary could not be published as it was desired by General Mainwaring. G.Gorer criticized the revised present form of the dictionary as: "After his death (Mainwaring) his manuscript was edited and published by a German Tibetan scholar who knew no Lepcha and not too much of English: all the General's fantastic etymological derivations were cut out and the Lepcha script abandoned in favour of an almost incomprehensible system of phonetic transliteration. The Government official in charge wrote to Herr Grunwedel 'The so-called Lepcha alphabet used by General Mainwaring is a pure fiction. The language has properly speaking no written character, though it is possible that on a few occasions a debased variety of the Tibetan character may have been resorted to. There is however no necessity whatever and no real justification for incurring the expense of starting Lepcha type, nor as a matter of fact can a complete fount of such type be constructed'. Considering that there were then numerous Lepcha books in manuscript in existence, and that the Baptists had already founded a complete Lepcha type, the instructions are, in a small way, a fine example of

Imperial diplomacy. The dictionary is almost entirely Lepcha-English, and is chiefly useful for its indication of Tibetan loan words; the identifications of plants and animals are in many cases questionable" (Gorer, 1938). But Lepcha font was already in existence in Serampur and the cost of publication in India could have been less than publication from Berlin.

Holfdon Siiger critically reviewed the dictionary compiled by Thikoong Mainwaring. "It is an extraordinary comprehensive dictionary, especially considering the early date of its appearance. It is further remarkable for the very large number of every day sentences and phases which it contains, and while it is true that some of these are of missionary origin, and therefore open to question as truly Lepcha, they are easily recognized, and allowance can be made for them. Although both Waddell (1899) and Gorer ((p.41) are rather critical of the Dictionary, I can only state that I have found it of inestimable value, and that on the whole my field work tends to confirm the translations which it gives" (Sigger, 1967).

Albert Grunwedel, who revised and printed the dictionary, himself wondered about the voluminous work collected by General Mainwaring and faced difficulty in compiling them. In the preface he wrote: "They are written in large octavo in 703 pages of bluish and yellowish, paper. They contain a huge collection of Lepcha-glosses, which were augmented by revising the first entry again and again. The single words were written in the so-called Lepcha character but according to the European alphabet. But I must say to my great regret that no notice was at hand concerning the method and the sources from which the collections were derived, it was at first impossible to ascertain where the lost clue was to be taken up again. But in sifting the materials it could be stated, that the author had commenced his work by collecting oral and manuscript- information from the natives" (Grunwedel, 1898).

Following dictionaries on Lepcha language are available, but Mainwaring's dictionary is not only the pioneering work but has been followed by all:

• Mainwaring, G.B. (1898). *Dictionary of the Lepcha Language.* Revised and completed by Albert Grunwedel, Printed and published by order of Her Majesty's Secretary of State for India in Council. Berlin.

• Cemjong, I.S. (1970). *Lepca Nepali Angreji Sabdakos*. Royal Nepal Academy. Kathmandu.

• Kumar, B.B. & Chiring, G. (1978). *Hindi Lepca (Ron) Kosa.* Nagaland Bhasa Parisad. Kohima. Nagaland.

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• Luksom, D. (1983). *Rong-Hindi-Anggrezi Tshukzat: Lepca Hindi Anreji Sabdokos. Lepcha-Hindi-English Dictionary.* Text Book Unit. Directorate of Education of the Government of Sikkim. Gangtok. Sikkim.

• Shipmu, U.; Rigimu, K.L.; Likmu, N.T. & Kunchudyangmu, D.W. (1996). *An English to Lepcha Dictionary. Lyangdok Kurmom. Gangtok. Sikkim.*

Mainwaring and his Love for Lepcha Language:

Thikoong General G.B.Mainwaring's command over the Lepcha language is without doubt. In fact, he is the person who has given the Lepcha language a proper and scientific form and dimension. Both Lepcha language and its alphabet were in existence but they were not properly used and directed. Grammar is the basis of any language and by writing the grammar of Lepcha language; Thikoong Mainwaring for the first time gave the appropriate and systematic direction of Lepcha language and introduced Lepcha language as one of the important languages of the world during the end of nineteenth century. Thikoong Mainwaring may be called the 'Father of Lepcha language' like

Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar as 'Father of Bengali prose'.

Thikoong General G.B.Mainwaring loved Lepcha language very much and used it in his day to day conversation. In order to spread Lepcha language, on his personal initiative, he opened up a Lepcha school at Lebong (near Darjeeling) and it may be considered as the first school for the Lepchas. "Lebong belonged to him (Mainwaring) and he greatly desired to transform it into an institution or College for the Lepcha population. He took a Lepcha boy to England who graduated in the Oxford University, and returned to India as the Headmaster of the Lepcha School. Unfortunately for the Lepchas, he suddenly took ill, and died at the Eden Sanatorium. His name was Thomboo Sahib" (Sprigg, 2005). After the death of Thomboo Sahib, there was no appropriate person to take care of Lepcha School. "Through sheer disappointment, he sold Lebong for the price of Rs 26,000 to the government of Bengal, and retired to England broken heated" (Sprigg, 2005). It is also reported that Mainwaring had the proposal of opening "a sort of College for Lepchas near Darjeeling. But before anything concrete could be worked through the institution the philologist died and a golden chapter of Lepcha language came to an end" (Lepcha, 1979). A great mission of opening Lepcha School and College at Lebong could not materialize just because there was no support either from any institution or the government. The death of Mainwaring is sad and is the cause of infinite loss on the part of the development of Lepcha language otherwise Lepchas could not have to face the present deteriorating condition all around.

Thikoong Mainwaring's high regards for the Lepcha language is reflected through his own writing. He wrote "The language (Lepcha) is a monosyllabic one, (though not altogether an isolating one, as it possess in a degree – as all languages however primitive do – an agglutinative structure), and is unquestionably far interior to the Hebrew or Sanskrit. It is preeminently an *Ursprache*, being

probably, and I think, I may, without fear of misrepresentation, state it to be, the oldest extant. It is a most comprehensive and beautiful one: and regarded alone, as a prolific source of the derivations and etyma of words, it is invaluable to the philological world. It however recommends itself to us on higher grounds; it possesses and plainly evinces the principle and motive on which all language is constructed. But, like everything really good in this world, it has been despaired and rejected. To allow the Lepcha race, and language to die out would indeed be most barbarous, and inexpressibly sad" (Mainwaring, 1876).

In his review, Gorer comments: "After profound thought General Mainwaring came to the conclusion that not only were the Lepchas the descendants of our first parents, but that – as could be simply shown by a device of the General's called the Power of Letters - Lepcha was the language spoken in the Garden of Eden" (Gorer, 1938).

Thikoong Mainwaring could enter deeply into the Lepcha language, their life and could understand the once glorious but present misery way of life of the community. His own letters can express his love, affection, respect and care for Lepcha language and the style of living and the community. "Of the language I cannot speak too highly. The simple and primitive state in which the Lepchas lived is admirably shown by it. It has no primary word (beyond the words for gold and silver) to express money, merchants or merchandise, fairs or markets. Their peaceful and gentle character is evinced by their numerous terms and tenderness and compassion, and by the fact that not one word of abuse exists in their language. Nevertheless the language itself is most copious, abounding in synonyms and possessing words to express every slightest change, every varying shade of meaning, it admits of flow and power of speech which is wonderful, and which renders it capable of giving expression to the highest degree of eloquence. The language also arrests the astonishing knowledge

possessed by the Lepchas. I shall here again make an extract from the letter before quoted:- "Of all the almost inconceivable diversity of trees with which the hills are covered ; of all the almost incalculable variety of plants and flowers with which the forests are filled ; the Lepchas can tell you the names of all, they can distinguish at a glance the difference in the species of each genus of plants, which would require the skill of a practiced botanist to perceive ; and this information and nomenclature extends to beasts, to birds, to insects, and to everything around them, animate and inanimate ; without instruction, they seem to acquire their knowledge by intuition alone. The trees and the flowers, and the birds, and the insects have therefore been their friends and companions. But now, this simple knowledge, this beautiful language, this once happy people are fast dying out. The Lepchas have left their woods and innocence and have fallen into sin and misery, and is there no one that will help them, no one that will save? (Mainwaring, 1876).

Mainwaring and his Love for Lepcha Life:

It can truly be said that General G.B.Mainwaring is a more Lepcha than most Lepchas of today**.** This is reflected through his personal life style. He lived not only like a Lepcha but his thought is also like the Lepchas. He always dressed in Lepcha costume of *Daampraa,* the traditional Lepcha male dress and *Thyaaktuk*, Lepcha hat. Even when he needed to go to Darjeeling for official purposes, Mainwaring used to dress up in Lepcha costume. His attachment with the Lepchas was so much so that Mainwaring was known as 'Lepcha Mad'. He was indeed a 'Mad' for the right cause of the Lepchas and the Lepchas will remember him for his exceptional 'Madnesss'.

In order to learn Lepcha language, Thikoong Mainwaring preferred to stay among the Lepchas of remote village. He not only stayed among the Lepchas but purchased hundred acres of land in

Lebong for opening School and College for the Lepchas. He also stayed at Poloongdaong below Sokhyaam (present day Sukhia) for some time among the Mun, Bongthing and the common Lepchas. His love for Lepcha life is shown by his choice of selecting the remote areas where the Lepchas are in majority and kept themselves away from the influence of the outside world. It is reported that during end of 1860's and 1870's General Mainwaring spent some time with Mun Dey Mem at Poloongdaong, Sukhiapokhri, Darjeeling to learn pure Lepcha language.

By learning Lepcha language, Thikoong Mainwaring became a Lepcha in real sense of the term. He not only loved Lepcha way of life but practiced it by heart. It is said that he also "married a Mun, Lepcha priestess" (Lepcha, 1979). He was the first and probably the only European who could understand and feel by hearts the problems and pathetic condition of the Lepchas.

Thikoong Mainwaring was very sentimentally attached with the Lepchas. His understanding about the simple life style of the Lepchas is reflected through his writings. "What or whatsoever might have been their original source, they here appeared in the most simple, primitive state, living in the midst of the vast, wild, magnificent forests, old as the hill themselves, and, as I think, I mentioned, to you, each family residing by itself, having no villages or communities, and but little intercourse with each other ; thus they dwelt in pretty cottages, around which they cultivated their plot of ground, which afforded them rice, - their staple food :- grain of different sort; cotton, from which they spun their cloth ; seeds from which they expressed their oil &c. From the forests they obtained fruits of numerous descriptions, edible and otherwise useful; thus all their wants were supplied. They knew no care, and but little sorrow, cheerful as the birds, and sturdy as the trees around them, they roamed through the forests inhaling health. They understood little about medicines and had not much use for them, sickness being almost unknown among them, but they

possess some very efficacious roots, & c, with which I believe Europeans are still unacquainted. Their religion was particularly simple; they believed in one Good Spirit, and in innumerable evil spirits; to the former they conceived their worship was due, and to Him they offered their prayer and thanks giving; the latter they considered prowls about, and haunted every spot; to them they attributed whatever sickness or misfortune befell, therefore deemed it requisite to propitiate them, which they did by offerings of rice &c. The first fruits of the season were always offered to the Good Spirit. I may state that the purity of their belief was, at a period antecedent to our arrival, somewhat prevented by the introduction from Tibet of the Buddhist religion; it had and still has, however, but little hold on them" (Mainwaring, 1876).

Lepcha is a small linguistic group of Sikkim and Darjeeling Himalayan track. Although Lepcha language is taught in schools and Colleges in Sikkim for the last two decades but it has no recognition in the schools and colleges of Darjeeling area. Lepcha language is one of the official languages of Sikkim but it has no official use in Darjeeling. The language has lost its importance to the Lepchas who have accepted Nepali as lingua franca. In course of time the Lepchas has become bilingual and multi-lingual race and the younger generation mostly do not know the four skills of their mother tongue. Even then the publishers do not lost their interest in reprinting both the grammar and Dictionary of General Mainwaring. At least ten times the grammar and three times the dictionary have been reprinted. Some such publishers who reprinted the dictionary and grammar are: Manjusri Publshing House, New Delhi; Doya Publshing House, New Delhi; Ratna Publishing Bhander, Nepal; Tairiku Shobo, Tokyo etc. But at present no copies of both the grammar and dictionary are available in the market. This shows the popularity and value of Mainwaring's work for the Lepchas. We expect that in the near future some publisher will take initiative in reprinting both the books.

At least twenty writers on Lepchas have and ten publishers used and referred Mainwaring in different occasions. It simply proves the vastness, in-depth and originality of Mainwaring's work. Although General Mainwaring confined to the writing and compilation of grammar and dictionary but his writing on introduction is not only a byproduct of his main work but he goes so deep into the cause of the Lepchas that the introduction reflects the love, respect and admiration of the author towards the race and the language. Some remarks of Mainwaring are so popular and general that they become historic, inviolable truth or gospel truth for the Lepchas.

To conclude, we may say that although educated in Classics and Mathematics, Thikoong Mainwaring served in the rank of General in the Native Infantry but ultimately showed his skill in the field of Philology and became expert in Lepcha language. His love, respect and interest in Lepcha language is undoubtedly be remembered by the Lepcha scholars in particular and the Lepchas in general. A new chapter in the history of Lepcha language has started by the dedicated work of General Mainwaring. In fact, the rich and beautiful Lepcha language not only been prevented from its near extinction but has got a new dimension and spirit of its survival and flourishment. Both of his books are still been recognized as the most authentic and basic documents in the Lepcha language. Most grammars and dictionaries on Lepcha language appear to follow the style and format of Thikoong G.B.Mainwaring with some modification here and there. Thus, Mainwaring's contribution to both Lepcha grammar and dictionary is considered pivotal importance and is the basis which saved Lepcha language from dying and has given a strong foundation for its development and enlargement. General Mainwaring died at the age of 67 and worked nearly 25 years among the Lepchas but his contribution in the development of Lepcha language is so outstanding, original and unique that it

would be recommended and used in the Lepcha society for many many years to come. Thikoong Mainwaring could not fulfill his dream in his life time to see his dictionary in printed form and his demise indeed is the end of a golden chapter in the history of Lepcha language. Mainwaring can rightly be said as the 'Father of Lepcha Language'. Born in a European family, Thikoong Mainwaring is a more Lepcha than many Lepchas of today. It is only Thikoong Mainwaring who could say "To allow the Lepcha race, and language to die out would indeed be most barbarous, and inexpressibly sad" (Mainwaring, 1876).

Thikoong Mainwaring devoted many years among the Lepchas and gather personal and practical familiarity with the life style of the Lepchas. He loved Lepcha language, culture, custom, ways of life much more than the Lepchas. It is really an exceptional work and full of admiration, appreciation, reverence and respect of the Lepchas. It is only Mainwaring who used some adjectives/phases which no other Europeans could dare to do so. Lepchas are 'most simple, primitive state', 'perfectly distinct', 'the free sons of the forest, the hearty yeoman of the land, the lords of the soil', 'descendents of our first parents', 'Lepcha language was the language of the whole country of Sikim', 'rich and beautiful language', 'power of letters', 'not one word of abuse', 'skill of a practiced botanist', 'prehistoric language', the language is 'far anterior to the Hebrew or Sanskrit', 'oldest language extant', 'most comprehensive and beautiful one', 'in the structure of Lepcha language, all language is constructed' etc etc.

In recognition to his contribution to Lepcha language, Sikkim Lepcha Youth Association (SLYA) since 1994 has started conferring 'Ren G.B.Mainwaring Award' to the renowned personalities for their contribution in the field of Lepcha language in Sikkim. Lapon Sonam Tshering Lepcha, Padmashree awardee was also honored with this prestigious Award in 1996. Although delayed but Indigenous Lepcha Tribal Association (ILTA), Kalimpong has taken

an appropriate, correct and praiseworthy decision in celebrating Thikoong General G.B.Mainwaring Birth Anniversary from 2013. Many more things can be done in this regard but only by developing and enriching Lepcha language one can offer proper respect to late Thikoong General G.B.Mainwaring.

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DR R.K.SPRIGG
(1922 – 2011)

Dr R.K.Sprigg
The Lepcha Saheb of Kalimpong

Dr Richard Keith Sprigg was born on 31 March 1922 at Melton Mowbray, Leicestershire, England and died on 8 September 2011 in England. After four years of his service (1943 - 1947) in Royal Air Force, Dr Sprigg joined the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London as lecturer in Phonetics in 1948. He met Ray Margaret Williams, great-grand daughter of Apu Dolma Mutanchi at Himalayan Hotel, Kalimpong and married her in 1952. His first contact with the Lepchas started in 1949 when he met a famous Pildon Mun, Lepcha priestess at Git-Byaong, Kalimpong. Although he was a Tibetologist and studied Phonetics and Phonology of Tibetan language but later he learned the four skill of Lepcha language and did extensive and exhaustive study on Lepcha language and literature specially on Lepcha Phonetics and Phonology. His work on documenting old Lepcha text and history unveiled many facts about the Lepchas. His language study reveals the richness of Lepcha language and helps in spreading Lepcha language across the State. For his outstanding contribution in Lepcha language, Dr Sprigg was made 'Life Member' of Indigenous Lepcha Tribal Association.

The following book and articles on the Lepchas are at the credit of Dr R.K.Sprigg:

Book:

- Sprigg, R.K. (2005). Sh*edding some light on the History, Language and Literature of the Lepchas*. Indigenous Lepcha Tribal Association. Kalimpong.

Articles:

- Sprigg, R.K. (1966). The glottal stop and glottal constriction in Lepcha and borrowing from Tibetan. *Bulletin of Tibetology* 3: 5-14.
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Dr R.K.Sprigg lived with his wife at Dr Graham's Homes School, Kalimpong for many years. He returned to England after his wife's demise. His personal library was filled with many rare, out of print and unpublished books and documents. He loved research and his library was open and free for all scholars and researchers. At the time of his living from Kalimpong to England he donated all his rare collections to different organizations and persons who are interested on carry out research in this area. He was a man of research on the history and language of the region in general and on the Lepchas in particular. Dr Sprigg helped Aathing K.P.Tamsang to visit and stay at London and worked as research assistant with him in 1952 at the Department of Cultural Anthropology, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London. He also facilitates appointments and sittings with the famous social scientists like Prof Christoph Von Furer-Haimendorf, Prof Firth and others who helped K.P.Tamsang with the theoretical training of social science and helped him to become Aathing at the later stage. Dr Sprigg also helped the common Lepchas as and when required in different capacities. Many a times the Lepcha Night Schools of Kalimpong had received various study materials from Dr Sprigg.

Dr R.K.Sprigg is the second Englishman after General G.B. Mainwaring who possessed profound skill in Lepcha history and language and could speak Lepcha language fluently. He was awarded 'K.P.Tamsang Lepcha Language and Literary Award' in 1996 for his deep love and sincere work for the Lepchas. He, like

Thikoong G.B. Mainwaring, was known as 'Lepcha Saheb of Kalimpong'. He lived among the Lepchas for more than twenty years and was a good friend of the Lepchas. He will live with the Lepchas in his writings particularly in his historical writings. He remained unparallel in dragging out the Lepcha historical facts from different sources which are neither accessible nor known to the other writers on the Lepchas. In an obituary Ren Lyangsong Tamsang, the then President of the Indigenous Lepcha Tribal Association wrote "Dr R.K.Sprigg, a linguist and scholar of great repute and a true friend of the indigenous Lepchas, peacefully passed away on 8 September 2011 surrounded by his family members in England.

Dr R.K.Sprigg, a Life Member of the Indigenous Lepcha Tribal Association, Headquarters Kalimpong was deeply concerned for the Lepchas and worked very hard and devoted his time and energy for the conservation, maintenance and development of the ancient Lepcha language and literature. He widely travelled and spoke, lectured and wrote about the Lepchas and their very rich and ancient language, literature and history and his book 'Shedding some light on the history and language of the Lepchas', will always remain a true testimony to it. Above all, this book will immensely benefit the Lepchas in particular and linguists, scholars and historians in general.

Dr R.K.Sprigg lived among the Lepchas in Kalimpong for about twenty years and he was more Lepcha than most Lepchas" (Aachuley, Oct, 2011).

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About the Author

Dr D.C. Roy did his Masters Degree in Economics from North Bengal University, M.Phil from North Eastern Hill University and Ph.D from the Centre for Himalayan Studies, North Bengal University. His areas of interest are: ecology, rural economy, agricultural economy, tribal studies and urban local bodies.

His books: Dynamics of Social Formation Among the Lepchas (2005); Status of Women Among the Lepchas (2010); Economy of North Bengal: A District Level Study (Ed) (2012); Lepchas: Past and Present (2012); Resource Management: Human and Natural (Ed) (2012); Micro Finance and Self Help Group (Ed) (2012). A Comprehensive District Profile of Darjeeling (2014).

He contributed articles for different journals, magazines, newspapers, seminars and books. He remains the regular contributor for Aachuley and Gaeboo Achyok News Magazine, the two bilingual news magazines of the Lepchas published by the Indigenous Lepcha Tribal Association.

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About the Book

The original inhabitants of the Eastern Himalayas call themselves 'Mutanchi Rong Kup Rum Kup' or in short 'Rong' and they are popularly known as 'Lepcha' in the outside world. Mayel Lyang was their original homeland but at present they spread and are the citizens of three countries: India, Nepal and Bhutan. Historically they passed through different strains at different phases.

The present book is an initial attempt to record some of the strong personalities who served the Lepcha society in different periods and saved or mobilized them against the crisis. The nature and pattern of leadership relates to the need and requirement of the community at different times. The mode of functioning of the leadership during the British rule was different from that of during the last quarter of the 19th Century and further changed in the present century. The method of protest and expression of grievances has completely changed over time. In this situation, an attempt has been made to narrate the socio-economic condition under which the leadership emerges and required by the community. The book may be used as record of facts and has tremendous historical value for posterity.